



Playthings  
of  
Desire

BY

J. WESLEY

PUTNAM







He bent and kissed her, and because the kiss was illicit, Malvern thrilled to his finger tips.

# PLAYTHINGS OF DESIRE

BY

J. WESLEY PUTNAM, *pseud.*  
AUTHOR OF "WHOSO FINDETH A WIFE"

*"Drago, Harry Sinclair"*

*Frontispiece by*  
DELOS PALMER, JR.

THE MACAULAY COMPANY  
NEW YORK

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*Printed in the United States of America*

OCT -8 '24

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E.W. Reat. Jan. 7/32

“Women are like pictures : of no value in  
the hands of a fool till he hears men of  
sense bid high for the purchase.”



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PLAYTHINGS OF DESIRE



# PART ONE

## CHAPTER I

### HER NAME IN LIGHTS

THERE were traditions in Gloria Dawn's family of stage-folk, all actors of note—cousins, uncles and her own famous mother—an aristocracy of the theater. Society lowered the bars to her, and it is not often that an individual is a person of importance on both Broadway and Fifth Avenue.

Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer and other famous matrons had actually been eager to sponsor her, for they found her as captivating off the stage as on it. Professionally, however, Gloria had dwelt in semi-obscurity until last evening.

Overnight a miracle had been wrought. Without knowing it, she had bridged the gulf

between being just "Celia Dawn's daughter"—and fame. The task had taken two hours and twenty minutes. Tired, but blissfully ignorant of this great moment in her life, Gloria had closed her eyes to dream of the future.

It was morning now—nine o'clock—an unseemly hour for Broadway, and yet the electricians of the Adelphi had stormed the sidewalk in front of the theater with ladders and bulbs and a seemingly hopeless assortment of letter units for the big electric sign above the entrance. Magic of a sort was theirs, however, and in their skilful hands the big block letters moved back and forth until order replaced chaos—and lo! a name appeared—GLORIA DAWN!

GLORIA DAWN  
in  
AFTER THE RAIN

That was the cryptic message the great sign now proclaimed.

The two men paused to glance up at their

handiwork when they had gathered together their baskets and ladders. There was something of awe in their eyes, for they knew what they had done—that they had placed another star on high to shine in the theatrical firmament.

The dust of Broadway had hardly begun to settle upon the new incandescents before a car drew up and Gloria stepped out. She gasped as she gazed at the sign . . . Her name in lights! She wanted to cry out! . . . laugh! Abe had done this—made her a star! With a warm smile she pressed a five dollar bill into the chauffeur's palm. She could have given him her purse.

Abe was upstairs in his office. Jimmie Ryan, his "press" man, and Rhodes, the author of the play, were with him. They were re-reading the morning "notices." Abe cocked his head at the sound of footsteps on the stairs. The next moment Gloria flung open the door.

"Abe! Abe!" she cried, throwing her arms

around him. "What a wonderful, *wonderful* surprise! I could kiss you!"

"Well, honey, I ain't saying I'd stop you," he laughed boyishly. "You're happy, huh?"

"Too happy for words, Abe! And it's really a hit?"

"A solid hit," he answered solemnly. "I'm afraid it is," he added almost mournfully.

The others did not smile; they understood that it was his way of saying that he hoped—that he *believed*—it was a "solid hit."

"I couldn't a written better notices myself," he went on. "But," with a pessimistic pursing of the lips, "I don't go too much on notices. The best ones in the world didn't save *The Bright Flower* for me last year."

Jimmie Ryan knew as much, but he was a publicity man—and cold print deceived him, as was fitting, perhaps.

"Listen to this," he exclaimed: "'Superlatives often come back to mock us, but we will never claim an alibi for saying that we have

never seen such beauty in the theater as charmed us last night as Gloria Dawn wove her web about the luckless captain in *After the Rain*. The play is a good play—maybe a great play—we do not know right now; but Gloria Dawn is the most bewitching creature in New York!’ ” Jimmie shook his head as he finished reading the paragraph. “That’s the best notice ever written in the Algonquin Hotel,” he declared. “Think of that stuff stripped!” He whistled his wonder of it.

“But the lights, Abe?” Gloria queried.

“You deserved them, honey,” he exclaimed with a toss of his head. He turned to the author. “Am I right, Rhodes?”

Rhodes was very well pleased with himself. He suspected that he had had more to do with Gloria’s success than the newspapers gave him credit for. But no matter! Here was success, and in the first thrill of it he was not one to deny Gloria her conquest.

“Of course!” he exclaimed, and then to

Gloria: "As I said last night, you were superb. I know we have a big success. Abe and I owe a lot to you. By the way, it was nice of old Crane to recall your mother's many triumphs, wasn't it?"

"It was fine of him," said Gloria. "He liked the play. I never knew him to unbend so before. But he is mistaken about my three years in stock—it was five!"

Five long years of everything from "bits" to "leads." And still, looking back, it seemed not to have been too great a price to have paid.

Life suddenly blossomed into a flower of such surpassing loveliness that Gloria actually grew faint at times with the wonder of it.

She was extravagantly happy; but, with success, financial demands which she had never dreamed of began to be made on her. Abe raised her salary time after time, but it no more than kept step with her needs, for she found herself confronted with a never-ending round

of engagements which necessitated clothes and clothes and still more clothes. She knew that the Dawns, for all their blue-bloodedness, had shared the average actor's lot of never being able to make both ends meet. It made her pause.

## CHAPTER II

### GOSSIP

GLORIA's mother caught her daughter's concern and waved it aside. Celia Dawn had lived for these very golden days, and she would not hear of economies.

"Mr. 'B.' wants you, dearest," she told Gloria. "He told me yesterday that he hoped to get Barrie to do a play for you. Think of that—Barrie! But Abe will not let you go. He can and will pay you three times what he is giving you now. And the pictures—why I saw Dolph at Marjorie's opening. He offered me a perfectly staggering contract if you would go West this summer. I did not give him any encouragement; the pictures will have to wait. But don't worry about the money you are spending, dearest; the managers are going to pay, and pay, and pay."

Naturally, with the sponsoring Gloria had, it was not possible to keep the eligible young—and middle-aged—men away from her. Mrs. Van Rensselaer had no intention of trying to do so and she very promptly said as much.

“She is the smartest, dearest, most compellingly *chic* thing that ever stood in French heels; and if there is a good catch this season—which I doubt—she is going to have him.”

“And with your flair for such things!” Mrs. Hobbs, of the Remington-Hobbses of Washington and New York, declared rather pointedly, “I presume that Jim Malvern will be the man.”

“*It’s* a good name,” Mrs. Van answered bluntly. “There is money there; but I suspect that Jim is a rotter at heart. All men *are*, of course.”

“Still, he is capable. He’s in politics now, too.”

Mrs. Van smiled superiorly. Jim Malvern

was in railroads; politics was just part of that business.

Mrs. Remington-Hobbs had little or no reason for mentioning Malvern in connection with Gloria. True, a whisper—just a whisper—had reached her ears to the effect that he had been seen at more than one performance of *After the Rain* . . . And Malvern's taste in the theater did not run to light comedy—without music, that is. But as for the season's "catch"? Why Jim Malvern had been angled for these four years past! In fact, Anice Malvern had no sooner divorced him to marry an English viscount than Carrie Hilton and the elder of the Wharton girls had set sail after Jim. Others tried where they had failed, but without success; Jim Malvern was not to be trapped. And yet, women interested him—a certain type of women. But that concerned Central Park West, rather than Central Park East. However, with the passing years the Malvern fortune had doubled. In his clubs,

Jim won the reputation of being a pretty solid sort of a man. The title "railroad king" was a vulgarism, and a bit trite, too; but in secret men wondered about Malvern. They knew he was a "big" man, that he had the backing of Steinhart, of J. J. Ives—and that meant the biggest money in the Street. John Sebastian Cabot, the newly elected governor, was a Malvern man—Malvern-made for the matter of that. Yes, Jim could go a long way if he chose to.

His cousin, Mrs. Jack Bloodgood, saw no virtue in the man, however.

"It's not within reason for a Malvern to be so completely engrossed in anything as Jim pretends to be in his business," once declared the "Vixen of Fifth Avenue," to give Mrs. Jack her well-won title. "He is getting old enough to be foolish and I suspect that he is. Forty is a susceptible age, my dear, for any man; and for a widower? . . . Well! Thank God, the man has a proper sense of discretion. I only

pray that he keeps himself out of the illustrated papers until I've married off my girls. These dancing creatures actually have children by our husbands now—a sort of life insurance for them, you know—and it's awfully inconvenient for us. I trust Jim will stop short of that."

The youthful Mrs. Chickering, to whom this bit of gossip was told, arched her eyebrows inquiringly.

"Oh, I could mention names if I chose to," Mrs. Jack assured her. "Jim doesn't fool me. I've seen his car standing in front of a certain apartment house too many times not to have been curious to know who Jim was attentive to."

"And you found out?" This rather timidly from Mrs. Chickering.

Mrs. Jack answered with an emphatic:

"Humph! Of course! I just couldn't stand being annoyed with not knowing. It's Renée Grant, the dancer!"

Mrs. Chickering gasped, but she was far

from being as shocked as she wished Mrs. Jack to think she was.

“The person who had his house-boat last year at Palm Beach?”

“The same!” Mrs. Jack put her tongue in her cheek with the impudence of a Cockney chambermaid.

Mrs. Chickering had heard the whisper that connected Malvern’s name with Gloria Dawn’s and she repeated it to Mrs. Jack. If a lady of one of our first families can be charged with snorting, Mrs. Jack was guilty, for she had heard the talk already, and her comment was to the point.

“Too good for him; absolutely too good for Jim. But he won’t fool her; she will know about this Grant person.”

## CHAPTER III

### A MAN OF MILLIONS

BUT Gloria knew nothing about Renée Grant. She was particularly careful *not to know* the small talk of Broadway. And it would have surprised her to know that her own name was being coupled with Jim Malvern's. She had seen Malvern in the theater four or five times since meeting him at Piping Rock. She had avoided meeting his eyes the last time or two. Why, she could not have said. She liked Malvern; but he weighed on her. In comparison, her own success was dwarfed by his. And he had achieved his so easily; she had never seen a troubled expression cross his face. Gloria rather resented this; her own long years of struggling were unforgotten. And she would age, and age was the impassable barrier; her mother had not been able to scale it. At best,

whatever career she was to have would be brief. Jim Malvern would go on making his millions. Real greatness would come to him with advancing years. Somehow it didn't seem fair.

Looking back, she felt that he had rather monopolized her at Piping Rock, especially on the way in to town. He had sent her a gorgeous basket of flowers the following day—but that had really been in payment of a bet. Ten days had passed since the races, during which time she had spoken to Malvern but once, and that for just a moment at an informal “at home” which she had given the previous afternoon. He had come late and stayed but a few minutes. Just fancy, perhaps, but she had thought he seemed aloof; and that surprised and piqued her, for, after the day in the country and his repeated presence in her audiences, Gloria had expected—and half feared—that he would show her some attention.

She would not admit that his failure to do so came as a disappointment; and yet, she was not

able to dismiss Malvern from her mind. He was out "in front" again to-night, and she knew she gave a wretched performance because of his being there. Surely the play had long since ceased to interest the man. Why, then, did he continue to haunt the theater? Gloria felt as if she were on exhibition before him—as though he were a judge come to pass sentence on her. She was glad that Abe came to her dressing-room immediately after the last curtain.

Abe was old and ugly and still hopelessly East Side, although he had been up-town for thirty-five years, but Gloria felt a strange affection for him sweep over her as her maid admitted him. Abe was so patently what he was, without any attempt at pretense, that she prized his interest in her. He called her honey—but every one was either honey or Miss So-and-so to Abe; and Abe drew the line pretty sharply, too.

Gloria had been none too happy recently as

the star of *After the Rain*. Men had always pursued her—desirable and undesirable—and she had enjoyed it after a fashion, keeping them at whatever distance she chose. Experience had not prepared her, however, for the advances Jimmie Ryan, Abe's press man, had made to her, nor for the attentions Rhodes, the author of the piece, had forced on her. She had, it is true, put them in their proper places, but Jimmie had retaliated by doing nothing for either the play or its star; not that *After the Rain* needed his help now. Rhodes had resorted to changing her lines time after time, calling rehearsals day after day until Abe had cried a halt. Rhodes had threatened to break with Ascher if he interfered with what the playwright called "necessary building up." Gloria knew that Abe could not afford to lose Rhodes, and she had consented to go on, but little Abe had said No, and Rhodes had left.

\* \* \* \* \*

A smile wreathed Abe's fat, round face to-night. The Rhodes incident was already a closed book with him, but for all that he was far from feeling as happy as his smile led Gloria to believe, and she realized as much as soon as he had spoken.

"He was out there again to-night," he said, referring to Malvern. Abe's house-manager had apprised him of the great man's patronage. He could put two and two together, and he lost his smile as he saw Gloria's face fall at his news.

"It ain't the show that's bringing him here," he said unhappily as he sank into a chair. "I wouldn't give a nickel for the piece without you."

Gloria did not look up. The removal of her make-up seemed to claim her whole attention, but Abe was not deceived. Her nervousness seemed to him but an admission of what he had come to speak about. And Gloria, dreading his next question, wished herself at home or any-

where but in her dressing-room in the Adelphi Theater.

"He's never been back stage, has he?" Abe asked.

Gloria had not marshalled her wits, and she very foolishly said:

"Whoever are you talking about, Abe?"

Abe spread his hands entreatingly.

"Now, honey," he implored, "you ain't going to be up-stage with Abe, are you? You ain't in love with him?"

Gloria laughed without wanting to. "Of course not, silly," she said. "I hardly know the man."

"That's the best fooler this here cupid's got," Abe muttered, apparently unconvinced. "People don't have to know each other fifteen or twenty years to fall in love. He ain't coming here for his health."

The line was an old one, but it was still comprehensive enough to make further conversation worse than idle.

For once Gloria left the theater without a cheery good-night to the stage crew. The men were in need of it, too, for Abe had "ragged" them to the very limit of their union cards—and for no reason at all—or perhaps he did have his reason, wise little man that he was, but if so it concerned his star and not his stage crew.

## CHAPTER IV

### “MONEY AIN’T EVERYTHING”

GLORIA did not let Abe’s directness worry her for long. In fact the incident had been quite forgotten in the pleasures of the following day; but Malvern came again, and so did Abe.

Strangely enough Abe found it hard to voice his thoughts to-night. In the end it was Gloria who said for him what he himself could not say.

“But every night he comes,” Abe protested, in answer to Gloria’s emphatic declaration that Malvern meant nothing to her.

“Don’t be foolish,” Gloria said earnestly. “I wish he would not come. I was terrible to-night.”

“Yeh?” Abe asked sceptically. “I thought you were immense.” He paused and fixed his eyes on Gloria’s. “Give it to me straight, honey

—you mean there's nothing on between the two of you?"

Abe's tone and the woeful expression of his face made him a truly pathetic figure. Gloria could not repress a soft, mocking laugh.

"Of course not," she said emphatically. "Will you have it in writing, Abe?" This banteringly.

Abe sighed with relief and grinned, mopping his face the while.

"You had me scared to death, honey," he murmured. "I know there ain't a woman in N'York but what would grab him if they got the chance. I guess if you was just looking for money, you couldn't do better."

"Please, Abe!" Gloria protested. "Let's talk about something pleasant."

"That's all right. These swell people have made a lot of you. You're earning big money—it's going to be more, too—but it ain't nothing compared to what they've got—and you wouldn't be human if you didn't get to thinking

now and then how much easier it would be to marry one of them big fortunes than to try and lay up a few thousand on the stage.”

“That has occurred to me, Abe.”

“Of course! I know how it is; but money ain’t everything—that is, a lot of money. You’ve got it in you to go a long way. This is just the beginning; this piece is only what you make it. I’m going across after Christmas; I’ll have a real play for you when I come back—Barrie, if money will get it.”

This news drew an excited:

“Do you really mean it, Abe?”

“Of course! You know, society and the stage don’t mix. The stage ought to mean everything in the world to a girl as successful as you are, honey—money, reputation, career—but it don’t, not to you. And yet, you were born in the theater. There’s nothing it can give but what is yours for the taking.”

“Abe!” Gloria exclaimed, “you are as gloomy as an owl to-night. The stage *does* mean every-

thing to me; you make me feel ungrateful by saying that it doesn't. Whatever I have, the stage has given me. I owe everything I have to it."

"That's it—I wanted to hear you say that," Abe declared vehemently. "I've got some relief now. But just the same, I wish you were done with society. I've been getting so I was afraid to open the paper in the morning unless I should read one of those things, you know—Stage Loses to Society. Miss Gloria— You know what I mean—Malvern, or somebody like him, taking you away from me."

Had Gloria heard this from any other person, her mother included, she would have been very much embarrassed, but she only shook her head now as she gazed at Abe—proof enough that they understood each other very well—and then, impulsively, she caught up one of his pudgy hands in both of hers and said:

"You dear old fusser, will you please stop worrying? And will you *please* stop putting

such ideas into my head? And don’t you *dare* say a word of this to my mother; it would frighten her to death. Now you run along before I try to kiss you. And—and stop thinking such things. I intend to go on playing for years and years and years.”

.

## CHAPTER V

### “I LOVE HIM SO”

SUDDENLY, however, Gloria found Jim Malvern a factor in her life. He had been waiting only to assure himself that she was necessary to his happiness; in love and in business he usually knew what he wanted before he reached out for it. Wherever she turned, now, she found him at her elbow. The gossips took note and soon the tongues were wagging on Fifth Avenue just as assiduously—if not in the same key—as they do on Second Avenue. Broadway heard the talk, too. Naturally, Gloria's mother was not the last to be informed. It came as a shock to her, for, although she loved money, she had but one god—the stage! That Gloria could even contemplate forsaking her career came as nothing less than a catastrophe to Celia Dawn. And Gloria, young and

supremely happy with the wonder of the first great love of her life, felt her air-castles tumbling about her ears.

She told herself she should have known the present hour had been inevitable. She had realized as much in those now seemingly distant days before Malvern had stormed her heart. She remembered she had said as much to Abe Ascher. But these past weeks she had been drifting on a rose-scented sea—not only afraid, but lacking the desire to break its placidity by tossing even the tiniest pebble of discontent upon its surface. Just where Jim and she were drifting Gloria had not known, or cared greatly. Their final destination—now that she saw it so clearly—rather surprised her. She had not thought of the approach to marriage in quite the way Jim and she had made it. He had not asked her to marry him, but that was only because she had refused to listen to him. He would ask again. Yes—and she would not say no. She might hesitate—even

laugh at him as she had done before—but she would not say no to him. She knew her debt to her mother, to her traditions, to the stage (and that included Abe), but she would not say no to Jim Malvern. Why did her mother have to say that Jim's money had blinded her? She knew she had never considered his millions in surrendering to him. Stung to the quick, she said:

“But mother dear, it is not his money. Please do not say that to me again. I know how you have counted on my success—you've actually grown young again this past year.” Gloria paused and turned away for a moment. “You—make me feel as if I were stealing something from you in marrying Jim,” she went on then, her voice betraying her emotion. “Why should it matter so?”

“Has he asked you to marry him?” her mother asked.

“He will,” Gloria answered naïvely.

“And he will name the conditions. Surely,

Gloria, you understand that marrying Malvern means giving up your career. Don't think you are so strongly entrenched that society will make an exception in your case; you are not the first one of us to be taken up socially. I assure you, my dear child, that the stage stops this side of the altar; you will either give it up or give up Malvern."

Gloria was hardly prepared for this—not that she had thought otherwise! She had not thought about it at all—and that by design, too, for she had sensed that in this direction a decision lay ahead of her which portended unhappiness for her no matter how she decided, and with feminine logic she had closed her mind to the entire matter.

"You—you seem surprised," her mother exclaimed. "You do not doubt that——"

"No—I—I just hadn't thought about it," Gloria murmured. "I—I know it is true."

"Well, you must decide, dearest. What are you going to do?"

Gloria shook her head. Minutes passed before she said wearily:

"I don't know. I don't want to say now . . . But I don't see how I could go on without him, I love him so."

Gloria's mother shook her head, but she wisely held her tongue. She seldom gave way to tears, knowing the handicap they are after fifty, but cry she did when she reached the privacy of her own *boudoir*. Such grief and unhappiness as was hers was selfish, of course, but at least she rose superior to the power of mere money. She would have preferred a hundred, nay a million, times to have had her daughter a recognized power in the theater rather than to have her the wife of the world's richest man.

And in that there was something fine.

## CHAPTER VI

### RENÉE GRANT, THE DANCER

SULTRY-EYED Renée Grant heard the rumor, too. In fact, figuratively speaking, she had had her ear to the ground these many weeks. Her line of communication with Broadway was a direct one. She had smiled at first; other women had interested Malvern at different times without ever really endangering her position. But her smile had come with increasing difficulty lately. She had seen less and less of Malvern as January went by. Her checks—those blessed checks—came regularly, however. That sustained her. She was far too cagey to say anything to Malvern. She fancied that she knew what it was about her that appealed to him, and her strategy was to make herself more inviting than ever in his eyes. She was the first to know that she had failed to accomplish

her purpose, but she masked her feelings. She had been doing that since her early teens; but that made it hardly less easy for her in this instance. Not that she loved Jim Malvern. There was a condition that passed for love with Renée, but Jim had never aroused it in her.

But to lose him! The thought prostrated her. She was strictly dependent on the Malvern pocketbook. He had squandered a fortune on her, but she had saved nothing.

Renée was, at heart, a vulgarian, but she was precious wise. Save for her line of communication, she had cut herself off completely from Broadway. She believed she had educated herself up to Jim's level; at least she had acquired a veneer of small talk that was quite foreign to the circles in which she had formerly moved. Her taste in clothes was not open to criticism. In fact, Renée had made herself a person of some importance to those who had known her professionally. Her eyes were luminous with

the innocence of a child. She was, of course, immoral—perhaps unmoral would be more exact; in that part of Chicago in which she was raised the difference is not recognized—but the hard lines and lips which are popularly supposed to be the concomitants of vice and illicit love were absent from her face.

In happy moments Renée owned a sparkling sense of wit. Malvern had enjoyed her immensely at times. More than once he had surprised some real virtue in her. He had said he loved her; Renée had not insisted on strict truthfulness from him. Their little affair had continued as such things do; but Renée, believing her life was ordered according to certain precepts—which she really didn't, of course, or else she would not have found herself in her present dilemma—never quite overcame her native fear that a "good thing" could not last, that the whole tide of life was against her and that Malvern was but an episode in her tangled existence. It was this very thought

that drove her (the word was her own) into Wheeler Johnson's arms.

Wheeler, at least, was not above her socially. He was her line of communication with the world she had quitted. That world, quite able to understand Malvern's interest in Renée, wondered why he "stood" for Wheeler. They had pondered this question in other "affairs," not realizing that men like Jim Malvern moved in a world quite apart from the Wheeler Johnsons.

Renée's Wheeler had filched from her a good part of the money Malvern had squandered. He needed it, too, for, save for a very sketchy connection with the tracks down in Maryland, he had no visible income. So it can be imagined that he felt vitally concerned in the gossip that 'had Malvern marrying Gloria Dawn. Panic-stricken, he had rushed to Renée with the bad tidings.

An hour of extravagant talk, of bitter denunciation, and of many threats had followed.

They were together in Renée's apartment when the hall-man signaled that "the big red car is here."

"He's come for the big break," Wheeler snapped angrily. "He's out to burn the well-known bridges." He caught Renée's arms savagely. "Listen, kid," he whipped out, "if it's a show down, take him for a wad. Why, you've got it on him so pat that he won't dare to turn you down. Let him see that you're wise. Do you get me?"

For once Renée was supreme. "Don't tell me what to do," she exclaimed imperiously. "Win or lose, I'll play it my own way. Remember that, Wheeler."

And as Malvern's key grated in the lock, Wheeler Johnson slipped out through the maid's door. A second or two later Malvern faced Renée. She met him with a smile, no trace of the past hour's turmoil lingering on her fair face. She had expected to find him cold, aloof, but her shrewd eyes found him no

more reserved than she had grown accustomed to finding him. Renée felt relieved.

"I'm going south to-morrow night," he told her.

"When the snow begins to fall,  
Then the South begins to call."

Renée hummed the chorus of the Follies' hit of the year. Jim smiled warmly.

"And you, Little Miss Take?" he queried. "Where are you going?"

Why, this was the Jim of old. Renée caught her breath with the sheer joy of life. Surely this was not just a pose for her benefit. She resolved that if it were she would answer in kind. Malvern should never see a tear in her eyes.

"Where?" she echoed. "Not with you, eh, Jim?"

Malvern shook his head. "No," he murmured slowly. "No can come, Miss Take."

Renée thought he sighed regretfully.

“What about Egypt and Algiers?” Malvern asked. “There’s a winter cruise leaving New York on the second—Gibraltar, Naples, the Pyramids. It would do you a world of good. It would be April before you got back to New York.”

“And you would be married by then, eh, Jim?” Renée’s tone was softly mocking. Malvern glanced at her shrewdly, surprised and delighted to find that she knew the truth and took it so splendidly.

“So you know?” he queried.

“How could I help knowing, Jim? I congratulate you.”

Malvern came over to her and caught her up in his arms.

“What a good little sport you are, Renée,” he said tenderly. “I didn’t know how to tell you. I hardly . . .”

“So you are actually engaged?” Renée whispered.

“No. To-morrow, I hope.”

“And what is to become of little Miss Take?”  
Renée murmured lightly, deep in his arms.

Malvern kissed her affectionately before saying:

“Why, you’ll always be *my* Little Miss Take. If I don’t come, the checks will. Telephone to the steamship company to-morrow and make your arrangements.”

He gave her a check in five figures before he left—an amount quite staggering even to Renée. And so the sun shone once more upon the “bird-cage,” Wheeler’s pet name for the apartment.

## CHAPTER VII

“HOW CAN YOU ASK?”

MALVERN had always taken what he desired. Sometimes, however, he had found it difficult to cut free when his tastes had changed. Renée had proven a welcome surprise. But, then, Malvern was not “cutting free” from Renée. He may have told himself that he was, but if so, it was only lip service. He had a conscience, and man of the world though he was, he had found it impossible to go to Gloria determined to win her promise to be his wife, until he had reached some sort of an understanding with Renée. She had made it easy for him; so it was with a light heart that he entered Gloria’s studio the following afternoon.

Gloria, in filmy gray crêpe, had never appeared so alluring to Jim Malvern as she did this afternoon as he sat down beside her, facing

the glowing hearth. She knew that he was leaving for Palm Beach that evening; but both seemed to understand that this visit was not motivated by his departure for the South.

For a week Gloria had known that he would come to her—that he would ask her to be his wife. It had made her avoid Abe, and he, in turn, had avoided her; he knew how futile any further word of his would be to stop her from marrying Malvern. Gloria's mother had not been so reticent. Perhaps she would have served her cause better if she had said less; but that is doubtful, for Gloria had known these many days that she would not refuse Malvern, no matter what the cost to her.

She had been nervous before he came—half-dreading the expected moment, now that it was to hand—and then, before she realized it, he was asking her to be his wife. His voice awakened a magic melody in her heart. She glanced at him through half closed eyes—so strong, so handsome with the flickering firelight playing

upon his face. Words which she could not utter trembled on her tongue. She closed her eyes as she felt his arms encircle her. His lips brushed hers. The desire to be always held so engulfed her, swept her on with its rush; and then at the very brink of the precipice to which love had raised her, her spirit poised, hopelessly trying to scan the full measure of her life. In a voice she hardly recognized for her own, she heard herself saying:

“But my career, Jim, dear—what of it?”

“Career? Why, darling, I hadn’t thought of that—I—I took it for granted that you understood.”

Gloria winced. “You insist, then, that I leave the stage?”

“It couldn’t be otherwise, Gloria.”

“No, I presume not—it couldn’t be otherwise,” she said slowly. “Jim! You don’t know what you are asking of me; you couldn’t understand.”

"Oh, I think I do, Gloria. As my wife, you will find a career opening before you that will soon make you forget the stage."

"I doubt that, Jim," she answered sadly.

"But you know how tawdry it is—the blare——"

"And yet I love it—almost as much as I love you. It's been everything to me."

"But you do love me, Gloria?" he asked eagerly.

Gloria smiled at him patiently.

"How can you ask, Jim?" she whispered so low that he barely heard.

"Tell me then that you *will* marry me," he pleaded. "If love can make up for what I am asking of you, Gloria, your sacrifice will not be in vain."

Somehow her hand found its way into his.

"You—will be kind to me, Jim?—very tender?" she murmured.

"Darling!" Malvern's voice failed him.

But he felt Gloria's arms about his neck. What need of words?

\* \* \* \* \*

Three days later Mrs. Dawn announced her daughter's engagement. Abe Ascher got the news in his morning paper. His eyes glazed as he read the headline he had so long feared would meet his gaze some day. He folded the paper and put it away in his desk without reading it. He was alone in his little office, but he locked the door as a further precaution, and sank down limply in his swivel chair. Hours passed. Some time later one of his employees brought up a cablegram and pushed it in beneath the door.

Abe stared at it for many minutes before he reached down to pick it up. It was from Barrie—the great Barrie—He had a play for Gloria Dawn! Abe groaned. Slowly he tore the message to bits. What need had he of a play now?

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MESSAGE IN THE CUP

GLORIA had almost immediate proof of Malvern's power, for no sooner was her engagement to him announced than she realized that whatever antagonism she had aroused by accepting his attentions had disappeared. In one way or another a great many of the socially prominent were depending on him to keep their security-laden caravels afloat; wisdom therefore dictated an eager acceptance of Malvern's wife-to-be. Gloria found herself deluged with gifts and invitations. She had always bowed to the majesty of the great city, but she had never imagined it the Bagdad that it became now for her.

With the passing of March she said farewell to the stage. Little Abe bowed her out with a

Spartan smile. Two weeks later, she and Malvern were married—a great wedding properly stage-managed by Mrs. Van, adding almost as much to her prestige as to the bride's—and then White Sulphur Springs for a honeymoon amid the Virginian hills, already budding with spring.

Gloria was royally happy. A sharp canter over hard-packed clay before breakfast, a round of golf, lazy afternoons in the warm sunshine, and Malvern always hovering about her with a lover's attentiveness, surrounding her with luxury and anticipating her slightest wish. As all lovers do at White Sulphur, they got off surprisingly early one morning for the old fortune-teller's cabin on Pine Top. They had breakfast on the way at what had been a great house in *ante-bellum* days, but now half fallen to ruin among the honeysuckle and columbine. An old negro mammy served them on the wide veranda—fried chicken and waffles of fairy lightness—telling them in an awed whisper that

this had once been General Jubal Early's headquarters.

Hundreds before Jim and Gloria had heard her tale, but no one had ever hung on her words with keener interest or rewarded her with a larger tip.

Mammy, in her way, was quite a fortune-teller, too. She "reckoned" that the beautiful girl and the gray-haired man with the twinkling eyes were "quality," and she obligingly turned her back so that Jim might kiss his wife. Later, with Mammy Joe bowing to them, they rode away, their happy laughter floating back to the old negress.

It took them more than an hour to reach the crest of the mountain. The beautiful morning rode with them, stirring their emotions and lifting Gloria, at least, to sublime heights.

It was she who first caught sight of the fortune-teller's cabin.

The tumble-down shack had the appearance of being the abiding place of spirits both good

and bad, and the wizened old crone, who stirred the tea leaves as she unraveled the mysteries of the future, was quite in keeping with the place.

Gloria, young and bubbling over with happiness, was delightfully thrilled. Jim felt her tremble and he caught her hand and pressed it as they waited for the seer to commune with the fates.

The old woman shook her head pityingly as she gazed into Gloria's cup. Mournfully, then, she said:

"I see sorrow—sorrow everywhere."

She did not look up, and Jim and Gloria exchanged a glance and edged closer to each other.

"I see tears . . . there is a shroud."

The fortune-teller's voice faded away to a whisper. She was silent for a moment, and then a surprised "Ah, here is happiness; happiness shining through tears!" escaped her. Apparently the future was not able to withhold anything from her, and she went on to sketch a very weird life for Gloria.

Malvern knew that Gloria was uneasy, and he was glad when they were ready to go. The old crone followed them to the door and pressed an owl's wing, sure fetish against the powers of evil, into Gloria's hand. Mechanically, Gloria took it. She and Jim had covered a third of the distance down the mountainside before they pulled up their horses. Gloria still held the owl's wing wrapped in her handkerchief. She took it out and gazed at it rather fearfully as Malvern drew up beside her. Her day had been spoiled, and as she looked at the gruesome thing in her handkerchief, a feeling of revulsion passed over her. She could not bring herself to touch it; but, wishing to be rid of the unwelcome gift, she dropped the handkerchief over the precipice. A sigh of relief escaped her as it fluttered out of sight. Malvern sensed her nervousness.

"You are not going to let what she said upset you, are you, dear?" he asked kindly.

Gloria shook her head. "Of course not," she

answered; but her voice quavered strangely.

"I—I *do* wish we hadn't gone up there."

Malvern leaned over and embraced her.

"So do I, Gloria," he said earnestly. "It was just a lark. I fancy the woman resented our remarks about her cabin. Come, we'll not mention the subject again."

Gloria smiled as he kissed her.

"We have a long way to go, too," she said, glancing at her watch. "It will be six before we reach the hotel." And with a word to her horse, she led the way down into the peaceful valley.

During the succeeding days, however, she was not able to dismiss the incident from her mind, and she was willing enough to leave at the end of the week.

Malvern had a town house on Park Avenue, but it had been closed all winter, so they had decided to go direct to The Towers, his magnificent estate near Rye. By motor, it was only a few minutes to town. Malvern had had the

place redecorated to Gloria's taste, and she looked forward to become its chatelaine.

It was their intention to go north when the hot weather came. Jim had a big game preserve up in Quebec Province that he was particularly devoted to. The squawling, white-lipped Saguenay flowed past the lodge he had built there. Malvern had often taken a keen delight in painting wonderful word-pictures of this semi-wilderness with its balsam-scented nights and chattering squirrels.

Gloria was so completely engrossed in her plans for The Towers that Bois Blanc, the Canadian paradise, seemed almost unattainable. Malvern, satiated with society, professed to be interested in the activities she planned, but it was only a gesture. Gloria failed to notice his lack of enthusiasm; nor did she suspect that he was disappointed in her for the first time.

He had rather nursed the hope that Gloria would take him away from the social horde. Fortunately, or otherwise, his secretary came

aboard their private car at Washington, and in discussing business Malvern quite forgot his disappointment. In his absence, several matters of importance had gone his way, and by the time their train arrived at the Pennsylvania Station he was his usual buoyant self.

## CHAPTER IX

### SCANDAL

MAY and early June witnessed an unbroken series of triumphs for Gloria Malvern. Society had not yet begun its flight Newportward. Fashionable Westchester was at its best, and Gloria's teas and dances became the Mecca of the younger set. Gathering about her the smartest of the smart, adding a celebrity now and then to suit her whim but dominating her affairs by her own magnetic personality, won for her the reputation of being the season's most popular hostess.

"You do not surprise me," Mrs. Van said to her one Monday morning as she was stepping into her motor to run back to town. "You have been absolutely capitivating these past three days. I do wish you would come to Newport for the summer."

“Jim wouldn’t listen to it,” Gloria answered. “He hasn’t missed a summer at Bois Blanc in five years. And I *do* need the rest. I’m really keen about going north.”

All of which was true enough; but what Gloria did not say was that she had been seeing less and less of Jim, and that her acceptance of Bois Blanc for the summer, when she might have had Newport, was in the nature of an amend for what she suspected had been a round of deadly dull affairs to him.

The following Thursday Gloria gave a dinner dance in honor of a visiting prince whom she had been lucky enough to capture for the evening. Jim had promised not to fail her, but at the last moment he telephoned that it would be impossible for him to leave town.

Gloria was not only hurt, but feared that his absence from her affairs had grown so noticeable that the gossips would not be long in turning their tongues on her. She resolved to speak

to Jim, and the following evening she sought him as he lounged in his study.

“What is the matter, Jim?” she asked more bluntly than she had intended doing. “Am I spending too much money?”

Malvern laughed as he sat up erectly.

“Whatever made you think so?” he questioned good-naturedly.

“You—you knew I wanted you last night. I hardly see anything of you any more, Jim. I——”

“We are not alone very much, are we?” Malvern queried as Gloria hesitated. Unconsciously, Gloria’s head went up as she caught his inference.

“Alone—I mean together,” Malvern added as he saw his wife’s eyes widen with surprise.

“Then you have been bored to death, eh, Jim?” she said unhappily.

“Why no, Gloria,” Malvern answered. He caught her hand and drew her down beside him. “You’ve been very happy doing what

you wanted to do, dear. Your success has made me very happy.

“But you *have* been bored, Jim. The people whom I entertain, and who entertain me, mean little or nothing to you.”

“Perhaps not,” Malvern replied slowly. “Do they mean so much to you, Gloria?” he asked then, his arm caressing her.

“I suppose they are the sort of people I must look forward to meeting,” she replied frankly. “My future seems to be bound up with them, more or less. I suppose I *could* take up settlement work or something worth while . . . Or we might get an open boat and go off to the South Seas.” Gloria’s sarcasm was biting. She was cross with herself, as well as with her husband, and at no effort to conceal the fact.

It was her first show of temper, and her resentment at his lack of interest in her friends brought only a tolerant smile from Malvern.

“Forgive me,” he said sincerely. “I don’t think that all of these people are the zanies that

I seemed to infer they are. Maybe I am fed up with society; I have had so much of it. But no matter; I'll not offend again. If you'll promise to like my Bois Blanc, I'll agree to like your teas and dances. You know I *am* awfully proud of you, dear; and I *do* love you dearly, Gloria."

Gloria's frown disappeared before such a complete capitulation, and with the promise to herself that Jim and she should find more time for being together, the incident was apparently forgotten; but scandal and small talk which she had closed her ears to as an actress stormed her defenses as a social leader, and a day or two later she heard the story of her husband's affair with Renée Grant, the dancer.

Gloria said nothing to Jim, but she could not help wondering if his interest in the woman did not explain his lack of interest in what went on in his own home. It was a crushing blow.

During the succeeding days Gloria could not bring herself to face Malvern, for she had loved

him very dearly, and the enormity of his offense grew in her eyes as time passed. That they could go on, she doubted. And yet Malvern had become so much a part of her that it seemed there could be no life without him.

As humanity ever has done, Gloria wished—quite impotently—that she could turn back the clock, back to the days before Jim had come into her life. At least, she would have had her career.

Reasoning of this sort would have sufficed for many; and had Gloria been as sophisticated as some of her friends, it would have been enough for her. But she had loved Malvern; and that made quite a difference. Naturally, memory harked back to the old fortune-teller at Pine Top. Was this the sorrow she had foreseen? The thought made Gloria shiver.

Malvern was at a loss to understand Gloria's coldness. Renée Grant had been back from Egypt several months, but he had seen her only once, and then but for a few minutes. That

he had not seen her oftener was not due to any moral scruple. He had found Gloria much the more interesting of the two.

He became very solicitous of Gloria's well-being, and his constant attention awakened in her the faint hope that the future might yet hold something for them. Some women would have left no stone unturned to find out every least little thing concerning Renée Grant. Gloria made no such attempt. She did, however, resolve to win Jim away from her. They would be going North in another month; that should give her her chance. If she failed the fault would be hers.

## CHAPTER X

### FLAMING FIRES

IN a social way, only an affair or two for certain June brides-to-be remained on Gloria's calendar. She was delighted to find Malvern taking an interest in them. It gave her renewed confidence in herself and made her very glad that she had not said anything to him concerning his affair with Renée.

Jim noticed her returning gaiety, and felt very proud of himself. In the course of the week they gave a great party for Miss Sylvia Cathcart, quite *the* bride of the year. Sylvia's father, old J. Wellington Cathcart, had been one of Jim's earliest sponsors. Sylvia, however, was soon forgotten on the night in question, for among the guests came Miss Anne Cabot, the sister of the Governor, John Sebastian Cabot. She and Jim had once evinced some

interest in each other—a very one-sided “interest,” for Anne had laughed at Malvern. She had been an *enfant terrible* for many men, most of them younger than Jim. Her mother had packed her off to Europe three years past. New York had heard of her from time to time, but being rather jealous of her success abroad, and resenting her often-voiced determination never to return to these United States, society had shrugged its shoulders and tried to forget Anne.

She burst on Malvern with cataclysmic effect. As he danced with her, his arm trembled. Anne had grown into a remarkable beauty, and her roguishness had not abated a whit. Charm in a woman is such a subtle thing that it is hard to define. Malvern found her very “foreign.” There was something so exquisitely tantalizing about her that he found it almost impossible to resist drawing her close to him.

“You are wonderful, Anne,” he told her.

"And you are still the same old flirt," she whispered.

"I've never forgotten you," he declared with more or less truth. She laughed mockingly.

"Was—Paris too far away?" she queried.

Malvern could find no answer. The music stopped shortly, and as he led her across the floor she said:

"It was very handsome of you, Jim, to make brother Governor."

"You flatter me. I had very——"

"Yes?" she interrupted. "Well, I understand he's made a very good Governor. Mother says no one sees anything of him socially. We never understood John. I thought he'd marry again."

"He never *will*," Malvern asserted. "He's all wrapped up in Laddie, absolutely devoted to him. It's the thing I like best about John. I only hope the boy turns out to be like his father."

"He may," Anne answered. "His mother

was a remarkable woman. Whatever of greatness the Cabots possess belongs to John; his son ought to have the spark. In the meantime, however, the Cabots have gone into social eclipse. Mother doesn't go out or entertain at all."

"Now that you are back, Anne," Malvern argued, "things will be different."

Anne shook her head decisively.

"I have no intention of staying in America. There's nothing here for me."

"There—there may be," Malvern murmured pointedly. They had stepped through a French window which led to the wide veranda now softly aglow with the light of shaded lanterns. Malvern saw Anne turn and gaze at him searchingly. For a second he regretted his speech, but there was none of the abashment of youth in Anne's eyes.

"Silly old Jim," she whispered. It was not a rebuke.

Malvern caught his breath as they stood there reading each other's thoughts. What a draw

she had for him. Renée Grant had once aroused something similar in him. But Renée was a nobody; Anne was a Cabot—a “blue-blood”—able to match ancestors with the greatest. Renée and he were “through” no matter what happened. And Gloria? . . . What was it that Anne Cabot possessed that he had hoped to find in his wife? Her flair for the unusual?—her cynicism?—her very worldliness? It was nothing quite so much as a philandering nature that matched his own that made Anne attractive to him; but Malvern caught only a faint suggestion of the truth. He knew himself well enough to realize that he would pursue Anne until she was his. He even saw it as a weakness, a something to fight against. Not that he would fight it. Perhaps it *was* unfair to Gloria; but mistakes were not helped by going on with them. And as he gazed down at Anne, so inviting, the physical lure of her mounting to his brain, he knew that Gloria and he *had* made a mistake. He bent suddenly and kissed

her ; and because the kiss was illicit, and Anne's boldness peculiarly appealing to something gross in him, Malvern thrilled to his finger tips.

Anne's eyes did not waver as they searched his.

"Your technique is almost Russian, Jim," she said as Malvern released her. The others were coming out, and Anne laughed as they joined Jim and her. Later, he stole away for a cigarette alone in his den.

## CHAPTER XI

### DESIRE

WHEN Malvern came down again he avoided Anne. Gloria was pleased to see the zest with which he threw himself into the spirit of the evening. The shadow of Renée Grant faded almost completely away. Anne made merry with the other men, and won Gloria with her gaiety. Gloria had gone to Cabot Manor, the home of the Cabots since Colonial days, soon after coming to The Towers. Anne's mother, a *grande dame* of the early nineties, had received her very graciously. Anne had been expected even then, but she had not arrived until the preceding week. Gloria had met her only once previous to this particular night. She had not mentioned her name to Jim, for there had been no reason to; nor did she do so, more than casually, the next day. Anne had but lived up

to the tales she had heard of her, and Jim's request several days later that she invite Anne to join the party they had asked up for late August met with her hearty approval.

Gloria found herself actually anxious for the North, and she was frankly disappointed when Jim delayed their departure a week. Something was not in readiness, he told her ; it was an excuse, invented that he might see Anne again.

As for Anne, she was no fool. It was not her intention to have Malvern hopelessly compromise her. She was willing enough to accept his attentions as long as she had a way out. Jim interested her. Just how much, she refused to admit even to herself. She was quite conscious of the fact that he was trying to arrange a rendezvous with her, and when he suggested motoring to his farm in the hills above Pawling, she very promptly said no.

They compromised on motoring around the Croton lakes by moonlight. It was risky, but

it was the sort of playing with fire that she enjoyed.

Malvern made violent love to her. Anne returned his kisses warmly but hardly in the same spirit in which they were offered.

"You forget that I have a reputation to think of," she protested, "a family reputation," she added lightly.

"I suppose I have too," Malvern laughed.

"With some people, Jim; not with me, I have heard a thing or two, even in Paris."

Malvern was on the defensive at once.

"Give it a name," he insisted.

"Renée Grant, the dancer," Anne retorted.

"I've seen her but once since I married. You don't think I was serious with her?"

"Oh, no! You've never been serious, Jim."

"Well, at least we can be honest with each other," he replied. "You——"

"Let's be honest with ourselves," Anne interrupted him; "it's a sportier thing to do. I hadn't given you a thought for several years

until we met the other night. I don't find you changed, yet you appeal to me more than you ever did. I'm mighty fond of you, but I've no intention of becoming your mistress, Jim Malvern."

"Why—I don't know that I had any such intention either. There are other ways," he added vaguely.

"I suppose you mean divorce?"

"Well, that is a possibility."

"But hardly a probability. Gloria seems a good sort. I wouldn't be too sure that she will let you slip through the divorce mill—Besides, Jim, I've no longing to have my name dragged in the mud for the edification of the rabble. I refuse to become a horrible example for them."

"God, you are cold-blooded about it, aren't you, Anne?"

"Or practical—it depends on the point of view, I suppose."

"There's always that to consider, of course," Jim said with a fleeting smile. "I need a woman

who can lead me, who can make me obey. I promise you, Anne, that I'll not stop at anything to make you mine. I've made a mistake, but I'm not going to go on living it. I can arrange matters; your name will not be dragged in, I'll see to that. Promise me that you will wait, that you'll come north for a week or two!"

Anne was too wary to say yes. Jim was insistent, but nothing came of it, however, except Anne's flat refusal to join Gloria and him at Bois Blanc. Malvern was not discouraged, for he knew that she would very likely change her mind; women always did.

He had seen nothing of Renée Grant, and the note from her which he had known would come, and which he had looked forward to receiving with growing dread, reached him on the day that Gloria and he were leaving for Quebec. It was really a decent note from one in Renée's position, but it annoyed and then infuriated Malvern. He answered it and enclosed a check,

but with the declaration that it would not be followed by others.

Gloria found him moody and tired-looking as they drove to the train.

"You do not look a bit well, Jim," she said affectionately.

Malvern glanced at her shrewdly.

"It's the confounded weather," he declared. "I *do* feel tired."

"Well, I only hope that the people we have invited do not come," Gloria said, squeezing his hand tenderly. "I want to be alone with you, my husband."

Malvern winced. He looked away rather than meet her eyes.

"I'm afraid you would find it pretty lonesome," he said with an effort. And then, fearful lest Gloria notice his confusion:

"Don't worry about me. I'll be all right in a day or two. Pierre will get me in shape before I've been in the woods a week."

## PART TWO

### CHAPTER XII

PIERRE DUCHARME

THE north country charmed Gloria. Even Malvern's glumness was not proof against it. They had allowed themselves a day in Quebec. The following morning they found their car at the Parent Square station. Pierre had wired that he was waiting for them at Chicoutimi.

North from the capital their way led through a wonderland of green fields and whitewashed farmhouses—a paradise the *habitant* had cut out of the wilderness. In the faces of the men and women Gloria observed upon the platforms of the little stations along the way she caught something of that fierce love of the soil which fires the step-children of *le Grand Monarque*. It was not necessary to hear them speak to know

that they were French. Gloria had seen their like in the fields of Normandy. The women especially interested her—stiffly starched, their rugged, shining faces good to look upon. Peace of a rare sort came to her. The world about her had been subtly changing, and she with it. Before they reached Chambord she was suddenly confronted with the fact that hurry had departed from life. Here, no one idles; these men and women were not dawdlers—Nature saw to that—and yet there was prosperity, or barring that, enough for all. And it was accomplished without *hurry*.

Evening found them in Chicoutimi, the rail head on the Saguenay. Pierre Ducharme, tall and bronzed and straight as an Indian, was there to meet them. He had been in charge of Bois Blanc since Malvern's ownership of the place. Before that he had acted as a guide for him. In that country of many guides Pierre Ducharme was regarded with respect by both his fellows and the sportsmen who came

every summer and fall. Malvern had fancied him from the first, and he had never looked upon the man as a servant, which was tactful of him, for Ducharme would have quickly resented it. In the old days his forefathers had held responsible posts in the employ of the Northwest Company—*couriers de bois*, brigade leaders, chief-traders. Somewhere in the past a dash of Cree blood had been mixed with that of his Norman forefathers. According to the fictionists, he would never have been able to overcome this handicap. To the contrary, however, his Indian strain manifested itself only in a passionate fondness for the wilderness his French fathers had wrested from his red ancestors.

It pleased Ducharme to call himself a *habitant*; but in the accepted use of the term, he was not one. One had to know him well to win the admission that he had graduated from the Agricultural School at Oka—a unit of Laval University, the Trappist School. Some one has

wisely said that any people wishing to have a country of its own must early lay to heart that love of the soil which alone can hold a race to its ideals. Ducharme never thought of his return to the upper Saguenay as having sprung from motivation of this sort; and yet, unknown to him, it had. He was proud of his people; proud of what they had accomplished, and nationalistic enough to see for them a future as a distinct race.

Pierre had never established in his own mind just how this last was to be accomplished, but the thought colored his dreams. Like most French-Canadians, he was thrifty. His position as *charge d'affaires* of Bois Blanc, the tidy sum he had accumulated (a small fortune on the upper Saguenay), and his fervent espousal of his people's cause combined to make him a man of importance in French-Canadian eyes.

There was no hint of this in his simple garb nor in the set of his mouth. His appearance on Fifth Avenue would have caused no com-

ment other than the remarking of his almost perfect body with its challenge of unmeasured strength, for clothes could not completely conceal the play of gliding muscles and lean, tireless legs. To the "outsider" in the North seeking "color," Ducharme would have been a distinct disappointment.

In a way, he was no less to Gloria, innocent that she was, for she had rather looked forward to finding in him some counterpart to the fabled *courier de bois* of old. The man's eyes and his poise soon sent the thought scurrying from her mind. She saw his face light up as he greeted Malvern, his eyes warming. She heard him speak then, and his speech was as free of accent and idiom as her own. Jim introduced Ducharme to her a moment later. He bowed over her hand and called her *madame*.

Gloria liked him immensely. She was very consciously thrilled. Ducharme was a new experience for her, for she had never met a man of his type before. There was something un-

deniably primitive about him, something of the wild—big and fine as the wilderness in which he had his being.

A launch provided the means of transportation between Chicoutimi and Bois Blanc, and when Pierre had directed the transferring of the trunks and hand luggage to the boat, Jim and Gloria and he had a bite to eat at a quaint little inn overlooking the river.

On the way down river, Malvern asked Gloria how she liked Pierre.

“He’s a black-haired bronze god,” she answered enthusiastically. She did not add that she saw in him a dreamer—a poet singing his love of the great woods and the white, moody river.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BOUND TO THE SOIL

LIFE at Bois Blanc was more or less different from the routine existence both Jim and Gloria were accustomed to. It was only natural that for the moment their interest was caught by it. In spite of the fishing, which had never been better, Malvern was the first of the two to tire of the big woods. He was sensible enough to understand why he found it impossible to enjoy the place as he had in other years. Thoughts of Anne Cabot haunted his waking hours; but he could not pursue his dreams of her, because his nearness to Gloria gave him a feeling of guilt which he had not known in New York.

Gloria, being new to Bois Blanc, found many things to interest her, and it was many days after Malvern had exhausted the possibilities of the place before she began to take stock of

herself. For one thing, she realized that Jim and she had grown away from each other; they had not found the comradeship she had hoped they would find in the north. The realization brought a bad day to Gloria. She had foreseen long trips in the woods with Jim, fishing expeditions up and down the foaming river, a resumption of their all too brief honeymoon. She smiled grimly at the thought, for these things did not materialize. The truth gave her a feeling of loneliness that was choking. She felt shut in by the woods.

The servants, all humble French-Canadians, had been very gracious to her. Ducharme had stopped at nothing in her service. She saw now that but for him she would have realized her position days back. He had never tired of showing her the secrets of Bois Blanc—the beaver dam in Lac St. Etienne, the deer runs, the salt lick where the young moose swaggered about and the great chute through which the Saguenay rushes to the St. Lawrence.

Whatever he had done for her had been tendered with the deepest courtesy. Several times Gloria had spoken of making the rather long trip to the falls of the Au Sable. Jim had not evinced any interest in the proposed outing and after several half-hearted promises to take her he had finally suggested that she go with Ducharme.

The thought of being alone in the woods for a day with Pierre sent a thrill through Gloria. She was so conscious of it that she felt a sense of embarrassment, and when Pierre asked her to go the following day she at first refused.

The matter came up again at dinner-time, and due to Malvern's urging, she at last consented to be ready very early the next morning.

Ducharme was waiting for her when she came down for breakfast. He had seen to the lunch and canoe, and after a hurried bite they set off.

Gloria had never been on the river at such

an early hour and she found it singularly beautiful. There was a rare sparkle in her eyes as she reclined in the bow of the canoe facing Pierre.

Their way led up-river for an hour. The current was against them but Ducharme sent the frail craft along without any seeming effort.

Song birds trilled their morning chansons in the woods which crowded close to the river's edge. Once the pleasant droning of a distant sawmill reached their ears. Later, they passed an old cabin set in a tiny clearing. A man came to the door and called to Pierre.

Ducharme answered him in his native tongue. It was just one countryman's call to another. Gloria understood it, and it gave her a feeling of peace which she had not found at Bois Blanc, for even though the camp was deep in the wilderness its thought was the thought of New York.

"Old Esdras has a pretty hard time of it, here on the river, now that his son is gone,"

Pierre said when they had left the cabin behind. "He is too old to go to the lumber camps now. There wasn't a better man on the river than Esdras, twenty years ago."

"His son is dead?" Gloria queried.

Pierre smiled.

"No, gone to Quebec. The wages are good there, but the expenses are high. Boys don't think of that."

Gloria had wondered several times why Pierre remained on the river. She put it as a question now.

"This is my country," he answered warmly. "Some day we will have riches here. My father worked very hard to make a living. My mother worked with him. But they often said that they had it easy compared to what their fathers and mothers had put up with. I suppose I might be pitied by some for the long hours and hard work that comes my way, but it is nothing. Whatever there is here my people hacked out of the wilderness. We owe little to any man. Always

life becomes easier for us. Our children will not have a bad time of it at all. Some, like Esdras' boy, for instance, are impatient; they run off to Montreal or Quebec. Usually, they come back. It is that which gives me such confidence in our future—we come back home. Perhaps you wonder what brings them back—it is not money."

"I *do* wonder," Gloria replied, her interest caught by Ducharme's enthusiasm.

"It's the soil—we are bound to it as a race! That is why I stay. I listened many times to the stories my friends brought back about Quebec. I saw those very friends, fresh from school, go to the cities to struggle for a foothold as a doctor or lawyer. They thought there was no place for them here. The world thinks we are an ignorant people, that few of us are educated. I assure you Quebec and Montreal are overflowing with young professional men whose fathers were *habitants*. We need those men here; their chance is here, too. I know

how my father and mother slaved that I might have an education. I believe I am doing the best with it by staying here on the Saguenay. Some day these woods will be gone. We will be raising wheat where the forests now stand. We've got water-power, cheap transportation. That means mills, factories. We will have cities of our own. In the meantime we need our educated men; public opinion must be molded, our rights looked after, our aims voiced to England and the rest of Canada."

Ducharme was revealing a side of his nature which until now had been as a closed book to Gloria. She was not only surprised but delighted. Studying his face she thought his nose and mouth revealed the idealist. His rugged jaw proclaimed a man of action, however, and not a dreamer.

"You set a wonderful goal for your people to reach," she murmured.

Pierre smiled. "I am sure of them," he exclaimed. "Only, we must not be afraid to pro-

claim ourselves. We are no longer French; we are French and Indian—true Canadians if there are any. We must not let Canada and England forget the debt they owe us. They must not take our schools and our native speech away from us. We want the opportunity to develop a literature of our own.”

“You know Hemon’s stories of the Lake St. John country?” Gloria asked. “I thought they were very fine.”

“I know every word of them. He caught the soul of my people and put it on paper. He realized that we are not a race of clowns speaking a comic supplement mixture of disembowled English and ridiculous French. But Hemon was not the first to catch the truth.”

Gloria was immensely interested, and from Hemon they turned to the Garneaus—father and son—to Gerin-Lajoie and to the folk-songs and folk-lore which Pierre knew so well. At Gloria’s urging he sang “Malbrouck” and “Brigadier” for her.

His was not a trained voice, but such songs ask less than that of the singer, and with Gloria's encouragement he sang one after another, not forgetting that favorite of all French-Canadians—"a la claire fontaine."

Soon after they had turned up the Au Sable they caught sight of a doe and her young fawn standing knee-deep in the water, lazily lapping it with their pink tongues.

Pierre nodded to Gloria to sit still and with the slightest motion of his arms he sent the canoe toward the deer. They were within forty feet of them before the startled animals became aware of their presence. They leaped clear of the water, turned end for end while still in the air, and dashed to cover.

"They were beautiful, weren't they?" Gloria exclaimed excitedly.

"I know of no animal that is not when you find it like this. That is true even of a cow moose. I've watched them for hours."

It seemed to Gloria that he knew every secret

of the river, lake and woods. Spellbound, she listened to his tales. The river narrowed gradually until it flowed between high walls. Far ahead Gloria caught the first glimpse of the falls.

Some day tourists will make a well-worn path to the falls of the Au Sable. Not that they need the world's acclaim to render them beautiful. From a distance they seem to pour over the tops of tall spruce. It is a wonderful illusion. Pierre and Gloria sat silent as if by common consent. The rumbling of the rushing water filled the canyon through which they were passing.

Pierre sent the canoe ahead until the spray-drenched air kissed their cheeks. To be alone with such natural beauty added a touch of sublimity that one can hardly hope to find at such world-famous falls as Niagara or Yosemite. This day the falls of the Au Sable were as they had been when man had first bowed reverently before them.

"I understand why you asked me to leave the kodak behind," Gloria whispered. "To dare to carry away such beauty would be a sacrilege."

Ducharme's soul was in his eyes at that moment, but Gloria was unaware of it.

"Can we go nearer?" she asked.

"We can," he answered slowly. "If you don't mind a little wetting we can circle under the falls."

"Do! I should love to stand beneath that wall of water."

"There is another risk beside the wetting," Pierre smiled, "a local superstition. My people say that the man and the woman who stand beneath the falls of the Au Sable will share a great sorrow and a great joy together."

For some reason not altogether clear to her, Gloria allowed the moment to become a more or less awkward one, when a smile or a word could have saved it. There was little about Ducharme's manner to suggest that he attached

any significance to what was otherwise nothing but the innocent chatter of the countryside.

"A joy and a sorrow," Gloria murmured at last, her voice trailing off into a brittle little laugh. "Well, at least it's a sporting proposition, isn't it? . . . You are not superstitious?"

Gloria's voice quavered strangely.

Pierre shook his head. "Of course not," he said, "and I presume you are not either. Don't be alarmed. My people took a mad delight in putting inhibitions on themselves. My mother had the entire list at her finger-tips and she could not stir about in these woods without being reminded of this warning or that. What do you say—shall we go under the falls or not?"

"To refuse now would be ridiculous, wouldn't it? Let us go by all means."

The thrill of standing beneath the tumbling white wall with its almost deafening roar quite erased from Gloria's mind any thought of the legend. Ducharme was almost equally im-

pressed, but there was a light in his eyes which the falls of the Au Sable could hardly have called to life.

When they came into the sunlight again it was as if they were stepping out of a cathedral, for in spite of the deafening roar the majestic beauty of the spot had put a hush upon their souls.

Ducharme made camp and prepared lunch. In a hundred ways he proved his knowledge of the trail, contriving comforts for her that the uninitiated would have marveled at.

When they started for home Pierre gave Gloria the paddle and let her steer their course. The current was with them now and they were swept along without taking a stroke.

Evening came on as they reached the Saguenay.

"Only the moon is missing now," Gloria said dreamily.

"We will have a moon before we reach Bois

Blanc," Ducharme answered. "A young moon, at that."

Later, without warning, it popped up over the blackness of the forest—a pale, lemon-colored moon.

Conversation died away with its coming. Around a bend the distant lights of Bois Blanc twinkled. It was almost with a feeling of regret that Gloria recognized them. For a day she had been in a different world, and the mood was on her now to go drifting on forever.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ANNE CHANGES HER MIND

MALVERN showed no interest in Gloria's trip with Ducharme. If he referred to it at all, it was only most casually. The day had been a happy one for her, and failing to sense his deliberate snubbing, she was at some pains to capture his attention. Malvern would not enthruse, however.

It began to dawn on Gloria that whatever of happiness had been hers at Bois Blanc had been due to Pierre's untiring attention. Jim had been aloof from the first. This train of thought made her miserably self-conscious. She saw now that she had made all of the advances. Not once had Malvern met her halfway. The blow to her pride was almost unbearable. Smarting under the hurt, her dream castles tottering about her head, she dressed on the following

morning resolved to be as formal with him as he could possibly wish her to be.

Malvern had arisen early, however, and was well on his way to Chicoutimi by the time Gloria came downstairs. Pierre found her after breakfast. The lights had winked out the evening before, and he had been up since dawn with the engineer, trying to discover the cause. Gloria had not seen him approaching, and she looked up in some embarrassment, believing he had caught a hint of the loneliness which she had not been able to shake off.

"Has Felix found the trouble?" she asked hurriedly.

"It is the dynamo, Madame," Ducharme replied. "He tells me it will have to be rewound. He has it working again, however."

The dynamo? Gloria remembered now; it was because of it that they had been forced to postpone coming. Jim had said: "Pierre had to send to Quebec for an electrician. The place will be in darkness until the dynamo is re-

paired.” More to make conversation, rather than anything else, Gloria said:

“Why, I understood it had been repaired but recently.”

“No,” he said hesitatingly, “this is the first trouble we have had with the lights since the plant was put in. I do not remember having said anything to the contrary.”

So Jim had lied. He had wanted an excuse for staying in New York. Gloria’s thoughts leaped to Renée Grant. Was it because of her that he had been so loath to leave? She laughed as she got up, but her voice sounded harsh. Had she been looking at Ducharme, she would have seen his mouth straighten.

“Antoine has caught a young wolf,” he said as they walked to the door. “I thought you might be interested in seeing it.”

“Are you going to kill it?” Gloria asked.

“No, Madame. It is a female. I am going to mate her with one of our dogs. For a long

while, I have been anxious to make the cross. Antoine has the wolf at his cabin; I am going across the river in a few minutes to see it. If you would care to go——”

Gloria smiled bravely. “No,” she said slowly. “I don’t feel up to it to-day, Pierre.”

When she reached her room she locked herself in. She said over and over that she couldn’t go on. Jim had, apparently, made his choice between her and Renée Grant. Well, he should have her; she would not stand in his way.

Several times during the day she was at the point of sending one of the servants to Chicoutimi with a wire for Abe Ascher. She remembered that Abe had often said that a theatrical star could never regain his or her full luster if the light had once been turned off. She knew how true this was; but surely her public had not forgotten her in the short time she had been away. Abe would be glad to have her back. That she did not go through with her resolve was only because of pride.

She began to hope that Malvern would bring their affairs to a climax; but he said no word. Gradually, by degrees, they came to a tacit understanding of their positions, and this without either having spoken. As time went on, they unconsciously ceased practicing the pretense they had indulged in for the sake of Ducharme and the servants.

\* \* \* \* \*

Malvern had a brief note from Anne in early August. She wrote that she would not come north; but he still believed that she would. The direct result of her letter was to set him to wondering what effect Gloria's divorcing him would have on his business career. He did not doubt that she would divorce him; he was anxious that she should. Nothing could keep him from having Anne; but she must not be drawn into the affair. He knew that Gloria did not suspect his interest in her, although he felt certain that she had found out about Renée. He smiled at thought of her. It *was* rather "rich," her being

brought into his life again after he had broken with her. And he *was* through with Renée; nothing could be more definite than that. He shuddered, however, as there passed before him in review the details of this now dead "affair" as the metropolitan newspapers would parade them. He expected to ask for some immense loans in the late fall; being a target for the newspapers wouldn't help his cause any.

Two weeks later Anne wrote Gloria that she and the Warrens and Brom Jones would be up in another ten days. Jim made a very good pretense of not being excited by this news. Secretly, he was as impatient for their coming as a boy for a new toy. Fate must have smiled, for Gloria was as eager as he to see them. Any one would have been acceptable; Anne, doubly so.

## CHAPTER XV

### NEW ARRIVALS

SERVANTS are quite the same whether one finds them in the wilds of Quebec or in New York or Newport. The love-tragedy being enacted at Bois Blanc would have set the tongues of serving men and women of any race to wagging. But Jim and Gloria's audience had a flair for romance. Each drew from it his or her own conclusions, but with an accompanying thrill. There was another at Bois Blanc who interested them even more than Gloria and Jim; that was Ducharme. These Americans were not understandable, anyhow; but they had always fancied that Pierre was an open book to them.

Neither Malvern nor Gloria noted the change in him, but old Sidonie, or Julie, could have told them. Something had stilled his song. No

more did they hear his voice in the woods. The smile with which he had always greeted them was gone. They remembered him in other summers; he had not been like this—solemn-faced, aloof, even irritable. Amiel had come upon him once as he lay on his stomach staring moodily at his reflection in the mirror-like water of the big pool below the springs at Grande Marais. He was talking to himself. Amiel had silently stolen away, but he had seen the suffering in Ducharme's eyes as the big man vainly sought to solve the riddle of his existence.

In other years Pierre had roamed the woods and rivers in August with a song in his heart. He had answered the chattering squirrels and impudent jays; the laughing goose had made merry with him; *Ipwamis*, the crow, and he had talked together at length. Now they called to him in vain. The red-tailed deer and the foxes sprang away at sound of his clumsy footsteps. Never before had he found his duties at Bois Blanc a care; now everything was

wrong. But in all his world nothing so out of key with its surroundings as he. He felt that he must get away; no contract held him to Bois Blanc. And yet, in his saner moments, he knew that he could not leave; something in his heart held him chained to the place; he could not go away from *her*.

He had known this since the day they had spent together on the Au Sable. Such a day would never come again. In some way the weeks would pass; September would come, bringing the day when the trunks would be placed aboard the launch and the trip southward begun. In fancy he saw himself standing upon the platform at Chicoutimi waving good-by to her. It would *be* good-by, too; he would not stay on the Saguenay; another summer would find him following the distant Mackenzie into the Far North. Thus would little *madame* go out of his life, and he out of hers. But he would have his dreams. She would never know what she had meant to him.

And yet, he *did* love her. Time would not change that. Her spirit had captured his without his being aware of it; but in the days immediately following that first happy week or two, he had fought his desire for her. It was wasted effort, for the magic of her had crept into his blood, and wherever he turned he found something to remind him of the happiness which could never be his.

Ducharme believed he had guarded his secret well, though he found it almost impossible to be civil to Malvern. He had seen him leave her alone for days at a time. He had heard Malvern's excuses, the lies which which he avoided his wife, the rebuffs to her advances.

Pierre knew enough of the world to understand that only another woman could make a man treat a wife as Malvern treated Gloria. As the break between them widened, Ducharme ceased his fight against himself, for in his eyes the woman he loved was no longer the wife of another. It seared Ducharme's soul to see

Gloria open her arms to Malvern, only to be scorned, while he stood ready to sell his life at a word from her. His heart leaped with savage joy when he saw Gloria turn from Jim. The end could not be far away. He, Ducharme, might not have her; but, at least, he would have the satisfaction of knowing that Malvern had lost her.

Pierre heard of the expected guests with seeming indifference. In truth, he was indifferent to their coming; it could matter but little to him. He did wonder just how the Malverns were to comport themselves before their friends.

The following week found Anne's party comfortably established at Bois Blanc. The excitement proved a good tonic for Gloria. Malvern lost his air of boredom completely. He found Anne more radiant than ever. To all appearances, life in the big house seemed quite as gay as any one could wish. Brom Jones was good company wherever one found him. Warren

and his wife were a bit too obsessed with their escape from the dry land of their birth to please Gloria. But then, it had become quite the mode to drink with abandon, whether one enjoyed it or not.

Anne got a thrill out of Ducharme. She did her outrageous best to flirt with him. Malvern's frowning eyes made her more determined than ever to have some amusement at Pierre's expense. Such an experiment was foolhardy with Ducharme in his present mood. Anne persisted, however, ignoring the danger signals and smilingly unaware of the nature of the high explosive she was toying with.

The end came suddenly, and with an abruptness that jarred.

## CHAPTER XVI

### DEEP WATER

FOR two or three nights the bull moose had been bugling—sure enough sign that the Running Moon of the antlered tribes was not far off. Soon the moose and deer would be moving away to the higher hills.

Anne's interest in this was slight, but she made it a pretext for being alone in the woods with Ducharme. At first, Pierre endeavored to escape going, but he changed his mind suddenly, too suddenly not to have aroused the suspicions of a shrewder woman than Anne.

They crossed the river the following morning. Once in the woods, Pierre led Anne on and on for three hours. He could have shown her moose in thirty minutes had he so chosen. Noontime came, and it found a very tired Anne. They never were more than a mile and half

from the river, and not even that far away from Antoine's cabin. Anne, however, believed they were many miles from home.

Ducharme had not proved any more amenable in the woods than at the lodge. Anne's temper was worn thin. She disavowed any interest in seeing moose in their native haunt. Ducharme insisted on going on, now that they were so near their journey's end. He had resolved that this day should teach Miss Anne Cabot a most wholesome lesson, and the beginning was not yet.

Anne was not suspicious, but she was tired. And she was resourceful. Ten minutes later she fell. Pierre lifted her to her feet, but Anne promptly went limp in his arms. A cry of pain escaped her as he put her down and removed her shoe. The ankle, which Anne insisted had been sprained, seemed right enough to Pierre. While Anne removed her stocking, he found a pool of water and making a compress, bound the ankle with extreme care.

Anne watched him as he worked over her, but she did not catch his eyes. Pierre's mouth should have told her that he saw through her little game. By the time he finished, Ducharme had perfected his plans. He foresaw that he would have to carry Anne. Antoine's cabin was not more than half a mile from where they stood.

He resolved that the cabin should stand him in good stead.

Anne's smile returned as Ducharme trudged off with her, her arms about his neck, her lips invitingly close to his.

Pierre pretended a great surprise on finding the cabin so near. Anne was not so well pleased, but she had to appear grateful as Ducharme placed her upon Antoine's bed. He stepped outside for a moment, and Anne heard him talking to the old man.

"I have sent Antoine to the lodge," he said when he reëntered the cabin. "He'll have the launch brought as near here as is possible."

"You are very kind," Anne murmured.  
"When do you expect they will come?"

"Why some time in the morning," Ducharme answered slowly.

"Morning?" Anne gasped, a little frightened. "Are we so far from the river?"

"It is some distance and your ankle will not get any better between now and evening."

"But we can't stay here like this. Why did you send the man away?" Anne was rapidly losing her temper. Her face paled as she saw Ducharme lock the door.

"Why do you lock the door?" she demanded.  
Pierre gazed at her as if puzzled.

"Er . . . some one might come," he said pointedly.

Anne was sitting stiffly erect by this time. "I only pray that some one does come," she exclaimed.

"Yes—?" Ducharme's teeth gleamed in a smile. "*I* do not hope so," he murmured as he came to the bed and sat down beside her.

Anne drew away from him, her eyes widening as she caught his meaning.

"We are alone at last, *ma petite*," she heard him whisper. "My order to Antoine was, not to come back before morning."

Ducharme caught her hand. Anne shook as she felt his fingers tighten over hers.

"You have thought me cold," Pierre went on. "You have mocked my shyness. Well, *mademoiselle*, I will show you that there's fire in me; I'll prove to you that Pierre Ducharme is not cold. Come, let me kiss you; I am hungry for you, *ma petite*."

Anne sprang from the bed, her fists clenched, her eyes snapping with anger.

"Don't touch me, you wild savage!" she cried.

"But your ankle, *mademoiselle*!" Ducharme exclaimed solicitously.

Anne gave him a withering glance.

"There is nothing wrong with my ankle," she snapped. "I——"

"Of course," Pierre interrupted. "I under-

stood your ruse. That was why I sent Antoine away. You are not frightened now, my little songbird, eh? We will be very happy together."

"You beast!" Anne screamed as Ducharme tried to draw her into his embrace. "How dare you speak to me like this?"

"How dare I? I but take you at your own valuation, *mademoiselle*. You made love to me——"

"I'm sorry—I'm sorry," Anne cried. "Forgive me! It was just in fun. Please—please take me away from here. What will Jim say? I—I——"

Ducharme's eyes narrowed.

"Does it matter so much what he says?"

"And the others—any one who knows me," Anne stumbled on, confused by her slip. "This lonely cabin—the two of us together! Do—do take me out of here—even if we have to spend the night on the trail."

Pierre shook his head as he stood over her with folded arms.

"No," said he. "You tried to play with Ducharme. Do you think he is such a fool that he will let you go now?"

Anne looked about wildly for a weapon with which to defend herself. A heavy water-jug caught her eye. She snatched it off the table and swung it above her head.

Pierre's hand shot out and grasped her wrist.

"No, *ma petite*," he said softly. His fingers closed, and the jug fell to the floor.

Anne broke away from him and ran to the door. She had seen him lock it; but she was no longer in command of her faculties. She hurled her body against the hand-hewn planks. A sob shook her as she realized how completely she was at Ducharme's mercy. She raised her hands beseechingly as she sank to the floor.

"Please—*please!*" she begged, "don't do this thing! Forgive me. Unlock this door and let me go. Oh, Pierre—Pierre!" Her voice broke so that she could not go on. She began to sob. Ducharme raised his hand protestingly.

"Stop!" he exclaimed. He went to the door and threw it open. "You shall go," he went on. "Whenever you knew you were in no danger at all—when circumstances guaranteed your safety—you were bold enough; you tried to impress me with your wickedness. Ha!" Ducharme's mocking laugh made Anne wince. "You are only a lily-pad—an empty shell. You have nothing to fear from me. Go! And you will walk every step of the way."

Anne got to her feet and followed him as he set off at a swinging stride. Fifteen minutes brought them to the river and Antoine, asleep in his canoe, waiting there as Pierre had ordered. Almost directly across the river stood the lodge.

Anne's face went scarlet as she sensed the deception of which she had been the butt. Beside herself, she cried:

'You have made a fool out of me!'

"So?" Ducharme questioned evenly. "I never contradict a lady."

Anne was so furious that she was on the point of attacking him with her fists.

"I despise you!" she exclaimed. "You prove the folly of trying to make a gentleman out of a servant—and that's all you really are—a servant!"

The retort stung, but Ducharme's face did not betray it.

"And servants are easily dismissed," he answered, anticipating Anne.

"You understand me very well. When the Malverns hear what I have to say, they——"

"But it is not probable that they will," Pierre said with annoying assurance, "for I shall say nothing, and I am sure that you will not."

Anne stamped her foot angrily, so beside herself that she could not speak, Pierre held the canoe ready for her, but she made no attempt to step into it.

"It is a long way across the river," Ducharme warned. "Your voice would hardly

carry to the house. I would advise you to step in."

Anne glared at him. Something whispered to her that he meant what he inferred. Sullenly then, she got into the canoe. Ducharme shoved off a second later. Neither found it necessary to address the other on the way across, and of course Anne found it the better part of wisdom to say nothing either to Jim or Gloria.

## CHAPTER XVII

### "LET ME BE IN TIME"

THE next morning broke gray and cloudy. By breakfast time it began to drizzle. Noontime found it raining in earnest. Clouds of mist enveloped the woods. During the rest of that day and all of the two succeeding ones rain fell. The inhabitants of Bois Blanc exhausted their imaginations as the storm continued and the humidity grew heavier. Tempers became short and sharp.

Gloria refused to be held indoors by the weather. The shallowness of the others had been brought home to her with annoying clearness. And yet, for a week or two, they had served to get her away from herself. It had been but a temporary respite. They would be going back next week; perhaps Jim and she would go with them. Somehow, the thought of

New York was peculiarly distressing to Gloria—a shifting of the scenery in the great farce she had made of her life.

The continuous rain seemed to have no effect on Ducharme. He went about whatever concerned him with his habitual poise. Gloria met him as she was tramping through the wet woods. He greeted her with a ready smile. It was the first time they had been alone in a number of days. Gloria realized that she had been avoiding him. It startled her, for she had not kept away from Ducharme through any conscious effort. She tried to tell herself that there was no reason why she should, and yet even as the thought came, she dropped her eyes from his; and only because Ducharme seemed to read her so clearly, to see through her pretense. It was as if he understood just how unhappy she was. And he stirred something deep in her. She had been conscious of it before, and as they walked back to the house, Gloria was aware of a feeling of confusion and

vague uneasiness which she found it hard to conceal.

Anne and Brom Jones had ventured out upon the porch. Anne got up and went in as Gloria and Pierre came up the steps. The three of them stood and watched a canoe shooting down river at express train speed. It was Antoine making for the landing. He had dragged his canoe up-stream half a mile before attempting to cross the river, now running a torrent.

“That ought to be sporty enough for any one!” Brom exclaimed.

Pierre grinned. “Too sporty for most,” he answered.

Shortly after two o'clock the clouds lifted. An hour later, the sun peered down on the steaming world.

When Gloria came down the wide veranda was deserted. The river was booming as it had for three days, but bathed in sunshine it seemed harmless enough. Gloria had been thrilled by Antoine's mad ride, and as she watched the

river racing along she decided to do as she had seen him do. Ducharme had taught her how to handle a canoe. She did not realize that such skill as she possessed was no match for the river in its present condition. Pierre had warned Anne and Brom off the river shortly after lunch. To fight the current running now took muscles of steel. A mile below the lodge the river narrowed for the Chute—a half-mile of bad water at any time of the year, and now sure to be a whirling caldron. The booming they heard on the steps of the lodge was the distant rumble of the water ripping through the ragged Chute.

Gloria expected nothing more thrilling than to be swept to the opposite bank; after which she intended to cut back to the western shore again. But her canoe had not cleared the landing before she realized that she had done a very foolish thing in venturing on the river. The boathouse was deserted at the time, or else she would have called for help. When once the

current struck the frail craft, it swept it out into mid-stream as if it had been a cork.

Frightened though she was, Gloria was undeniably thrilled by her wild ride. As the shoreline began to slip past without her nearing it, she put every ounce of strength that she possessed into her paddle strokes. She might better have saved her strength. Her ears caught the rising boom of the Chute. Stouter hearts than hers had shivered at thought of being swept through it. Icy fingers seemed to clutch her. Terror-stricken, she half got to her feet. A movement of the canoe warned her in time, and she sank to her knees, her paddle gone.

She turned a blanched face toward the lodge. She tried to cry out, but her parched throat strangled her voice. With clearness truly awful she saw how futile it was to hope for help. Even if it came now, it would be too late. In a few brief minutes, the jagged rocks that guarded the Chute would be ripping her canoe

to ribbons. And yet Gloria could not take her eyes away from the house. Where was Ducharme? Of them all, she thought only of Pierre.

She blinked her eyes as she thought she caught a bit of moving color on the veranda. . . . Her eyes had not deceived her—the bit of flaming red moved—she knew Sue Warren's scarlet sweater! Other figures came out of the house—two or three—she could not be sure. Would they see her? What could they do to save her? Gloria raised her hands to God. There was one who would not let his own safety hold him back—she prayed that he might be one of the moving specks on the comfortable veranda.

A whole second passed—and no one dashed toward the waiting canoe. It was an eternity Gloria shut her eyes and turned away. No need to look again—Pierre was not there! But he was! At the moment he was leaping over the veranda railing and dashing for the boat-house.

The Warrens and Brom and he had finished a rubber of bridge but a moment ago. He had been the last to come out. The distant canoe, drifting broadside to the current, caught his eye almost immediately. He snatched up a pair of glasses and focused them upon the dancing speck. The others had caught his excitement, and as he let the glasses fall, they heard him groan.

"Good God!" he cried. "Gloria!"

Warren tried to question him, but he hurled him out of his way. Like a deer, he took the railing. Thirty seconds later they heard the launch motor begin to bark. Its purring rose to a whine. Then, like a jack out of its box, the swift craft shot out into the river. With a wide sweep, Ducharme swung down-stream, the nose of the boat buried in the water, a white wake marking where it had passed but a second ago. Engine and current pulled together; faster and faster the launch leaped ahead. The terrific strain on the hull started the seams.

“Rip!” Ducharme roared. “I’ll drive you until you fall apart!” His eyes were wild. He tore off his clothes as the boat shot on. “Let me be in time,” he mumbled over and over. “Let me get there in time!”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### "HE'S A MAN!"

ALTHOUGH Ducharme realized that he gained rapidly on the bouncing canoe it was even more apparent to those on shore. In the brief moment since he had left the landing, Pierre had cut down the distance between himself and Gloria by half. Even so, his effort seemed a hopeless one. In another ten minutes they would see the canoe sucked down into the Chute. Already the frail bark was moving faster as the river narrowed for its plunge.

"He's throwing his life away," Brom muttered. "Even if he catches her, what can he do? The launch will be ground to bits."

"I guess he's not thinking of that," Warren answered sarcastically. "If I were only half as clever as I am I could tell you why he is

taking a hundred-to-one chance on saving her. I guess both of you understand me."

Brom turned away frankly disgusted.

"But he's a *man*," Sue Warren sobbed.

"He's all that!" Brom agreed. "If we could only do something to help him," he cried. "We stand here like worms while they're fighting for their lives. Where's Malvern? Isn't there some way we can get down to the Chute? My God, let us do something!"

He caught the sound of horses breaking into a gallop just then. A second later Malvern and Felix, the engineer, who had awakened Jim from a sound nap, dashed around the corner of the house and into the woods. Antoine and the servants came running now.

"It's Malvern—Malvern and Felix!" Brom cried. "Antoine!" he shouted then. "Is there a road to the Chute?"

"*Oui, m'sieu*," Antoine said huskily. "Dat's pretty good road; but wat use de road? No use! Not'ing come hout de Chute alive. *Mon*

*grand Pierre*,” he mumbled as he turned away, rubbing a tear across his cheek with the back of his grizzled hand.

“There may be something we can do,” Brom declared. “I won’t stand here like this. Come on, Warren!”

They ran down the steps and across the clearing and into the woods. Brom could hear the others following them. For the time being the trees shut Gloria and Pierre from view, but a quarter of a mile further on the road topped a rise that brought them above the river. Brom was still in the lead. He gave a mighty shout as he saw the launch within fifteen feet of the canoe. Glasses to his eyes, he watched. Gloria was on her feet. Ducharme was shouting to her. The Frenchman was stripped to the waist. Brom could see him set himself as the bow of the launch breasted the stern of the canoe. Saw-toothed rocks, black and grim, loomed just ahead, the water a seething white as it whirled about them.

"He's going to jump," Warren cried. Antoine and the others shaded their eyes with their hands to see the more clearly.

"*Mon Dieu!* Dey are in de Chute!" Antoine groaned.

A second passed. Without glasses it was almost impossible to tell what was happening. Instinctively they turned to Brom. They saw him stiffen. Their faces went white as they saw his fingers tighten upon the binoculars. Suddenly his fist shot into the air.

"He's got her! *He's got her!*" he yelled. "He's got her into the launch!"

"But he'll never swing the launch around now," Warren cried.

"Swing her?" Brom demanded. "Swing hell! He's driving her straight down the Chute!"

A curtain seemed to drop over the river. When they looked again, launch and canoe were gone.

"He played it straight to the last," Brom

muttered. “And we talk about thoroughbreds! —there goes one. I hope to God Gloria gets a flash of the truth before she dies.”

Brom and Sue had walked away from the others. Sue put her hand on Brom’s arm as she said:

“Don’t worry, Brom; a woman realizes the truth oftener than you think. Gloria knows.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### “I HAD TO COME”

EVEN as Pierre drew Gloria into the launch, the canoe was crushed to kindling wood between the larger boat and the rocks Brom had seen.

“Brace yourself,” he cried out. “I’m going to run the Chute. If the rudder doesn’t snap off, we may get through. But don’t jump if we strike—understand?—*don’t jump!*”

Gloria nodded that she understood.

“Crawl back here. Get your shoes and skirt off. We haven’t long to wait for our answer.”

Gloria was crying, but she was not ashamed of her tears.

“You are wonderful, Pierre,” she said slowly, “so brave. I knew you would come if you were there—I wanted you to. Dear God, I didn’t know what I was asking. You had your life before you—no mistakes to undo.

I—" Gloria's voice broke completely. She could not go on for a second or two. "I—I am not worth the sacrifice you are making," she said at last. She placed the palm of her hand against his cheek. "Why did you do this thing, Pierre?"

He trembled under her touch. For an instant they gazed at each other's souls.

"*Madame*," he breathed so low that she barely heard, "you—you ask what Ducharme cannot answer. I—I had to come."

"If I could repay you—"

Pierre shook his head.

"No—*Madame*, let there be no talk of repaying me. I am to blame; I should have warned you as I did the others. I have no—" The words died on his lips. From almost beneath the very bow of the boat a razor-edged ledge stared at him. He clutched Gloria's arm and threw the wheel over. The sharp rocks cut into the hull as the launch veered off, raking it from stem to stern.

Gloria had closed her eyes as the grinding, tearing crash had traveled aft. She had expected to find herself in the water the next moment. She looked about her now, unable to understand at first that the launch still floated.

"The rudder is gone," Pierre announced grimly, as the boat wallowed drunkenly. The rushing water spun the craft around then, bore it away. Gloria saw that the boat was settling rapidly. In a few minutes the motor was half under water.

"Shall I try to bail it out?" she asked.

"Save your strength," Ducharme commanded. "The boat will float until we are out of the Chute if we get by the rocks."

For a time it seemed that they would win through. The river was running so high that many of the barriers were well under water. Ducharme knew that with fair luck they would get as far as the lower end of the Chute without further mishap. He did not tell Gloria that it was but a brief respite before the end. Drift-

ing broadside as the launch was, nothing could have saved it from being battered to pieces against the reefs which never in his knowledge of the river had been under water. His only hope was that they would avoid injury when the boat struck. It was their only chance of escaping death. The river widened immediately below the reefs, but even so it would take a superhuman effort to get them to shore. It would depend on Gloria. Injury to her would cost the lives of both.

The end came as Pierre had foreseen. One second the reefs were a hundred yards away; the next the boat was being lifted out of the water and hurled against them. Thunder beat at their ears. Pierre caught one arm around a stanchion and cried out to Gloria to hang on to him. His words were barely uttered when the crash came—deafening, fiendish!

Ducharme hugged Gloria tightly, but even so he felt her being torn away from him. The shattered boat poised for a brief instant. Du-

charme felt it. Raising Gloria above his head, he pitched her into the swirling water and dove after her. He had timed himself well, for no sooner had he quit the launch than it crumbled. Suddenly, the water was filled with drifting wreckage. He could see Gloria just ahead of him. He called to her, and struck out with long sweeping strokes, hoping to reach her before the floating wreckage reached her. But the litter of torn timbers and broken stanchions outdistanced him. The roof of the small cabin came whirling by. He caught it, and hand over hand he wormed his way to the front of it. It quickly bore him down on Gloria. He caught her as he went racing by. He half shoved her upon the cabin top. Another hundred yards, and an eddy caught the roof. Ducharme drew a great breath into his lungs as he sensed that they were being whirled toward the shore.

Far ahead, he could see the driftwood sweeping on. About fifty yards from shore it turned and dashed back into midstream. Ducharme

determined that when they reached the turning he would strike for the bank. He spoke to Gloria, telling her to be ready. She answered him bravely enough, although her face wore the whiteness of death. When Ducharme gave the word she jumped. He lunged through the water to her side. With his arm under her shoulder, he struck out for shore. Each succeeding yard was gained more easily. In ten minutes Pierre carried her up a narrow sand-spit. She had fainted while they were still in the water.

Ducharme held her lightly, gazing tenderly at her wax-like face. He, Ducharme, had saved her! Saved her to lose her! A wave of emotion engulfed him. Mastered by himself, he bent his head and kissed her lips. He groaned as he placed her upon the white sand and chafed her wrists.

Gloria's eyes fluttered open. Wearily she searched for Pierre's and then held them unwinkingly. She did not know that he had

kissed her ; but Malvern, gazing down on them from the top of the great wall of gneiss through which the Chute had cut its way, had seen.

Nothing could have revealed the truth more clearly to him. He bowed his head as he started down the trail which led to the water—not angry, but ashamed.

## CHAPTER XX

### A ROGUE'S PROGRESS

AFTER a day in bed Gloria seemed none the worse for her experience save that her eyes still wore a look of tiredness. Malvern had been very attentive; so much so that Anne announced that she was leaving on Saturday. Jim promptly sensed the reason for her leaving before the others went. He met her that afternoon by appointment in the little rustic summer-house perched high upon the side of the hill in back of the lodge.

"Why are you running off, Anne?" he asked bluntly, making no attempt to hide his perturbation.

Anne chose to be haughty.

"Why—I've already stayed longer than I intended," she said lightly.

"But we had agreed that all of us should go together."

"It was only a tentative arrangement. Gloria and you will undoubtedly stay on for a while, now."

"So that's it, eh?" Malvern exclaimed.

"What?"

"Gloria!"

Anne laughed mirthlessly. "Don't be absurd," she said.

"I'm not being absurd. Ever since I brought Gloria back to the lodge, you have acted strangely. I saw you change immediately."

"I marked a change in you, too, Jim."

"So? You think I change so easily, eh? Well, you have seen me playing a part."

Anne's laugh thoroughly exasperated Malvern.

"You have been very tender in your rôle, Jim," she said.

An angry red came into Malvern's cheeks. "Lord, Anne," he exclaimed, "we are not get-

ting anywhere." He got up and caught her hand. "You know I love you. I'm going to marry you, and nothing will stop me. Are you going to fail me just when I've found the way out?"

Anne got up and walked to the railing where she stood looking down at the distant river, white in the westering sun.

"I haven't said I would marry you, Jim," she murmured without looking at him. "I—I may not marry at all."

"That's temper, Anne," Malvern replied brutally. "John has confided in me; I know the condition of the Cabot finances."

"You *would* know," Anne flung at him over her shoulder. She turned to face him then, and exclaimed sharply: "Perhaps that will explain to you why I can't afford to have my name dragged through a divorce scandal."

"Your name will not enter into it," declared Malvern. "There'll be no scandal, either."

"No? From what I've heard your past will

not stand the searching rays of front page publicity."

Malvern took the thrust with a smile.

"I'm glad that you recognize it as a 'past' and not as con—"

"That doesn't interest me, Jim," Anne interrupted. "I've come to expect infidelity of men. But all this talk is idle; Gloria still believes that she is in love with you. If she had any thought of divorcing you, she would have given you some indication of it before this."

"What she does is beside the point," Malvern declared flatly. "When the time comes, I will get the divorce."

"You?" Anne laughed skeptically. "Again I say you are absurd, Jim Malvern. Gloria's been more than square with you."

"She's in love with Ducharme. . . . That surprises you, eh?"

"What?" It was incredible.

"Yes, and he is in love with her," Malvern went on. "I saw him as he carried her to the

shore day before yesterday. He kissed her as he stood there with her in his arms. Why, you don't think he would have gambled his life on a thousand-to-one shot like that just to save my wife, do you?"

"What makes you think Gloria is interested in him?"

"Oh, maybe she doesn't realize that she is—not yet. But it will come. There's color to Ducharme."

"But he will drop out of her life after next week."

"He will not!" exclaimed Malvern. Anne gazed shrewdly at him.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded, her eyes searching his.

"I'm going to encourage him. When we go south, Ducharme goes along!"

"Jim!"

"Perhaps you understand now. I put it up to Gloria. She was against asking him at first, but when I suggested taking him down for the

winter as a sort of reward for what he did, she agreed to it."

"Has she asked him yet?"

Malvern nodded.

"He refused at the time; but he has agreed to go."

Under other circumstances Anne might have shown some scruple against being a party to this base plotting, but her hatred of Ducharme blinded her. She was even conscious of a feeling of exhilaration as she foresaw herself amply revenged for the ignominy she had suffered at the Frenchman's hands. When Malvern put his arm around her and kissed her she did not object.

"Be patient," he whispered. "We will not have to wait long, Anne. Say that you will stay on here until all of us go. The woods will be turning soon. Bois Blanc is at its best then. I want to get in a little shooting before I run back to New York. But there is a more important reason than that keeping me: I want Du-

charme to have his chance. What do you say, Anne—will you stay?"

The trumps were in Anne's hand again and she knew it. It delighted her to be non-committal; but Malvern knew her well enough to understand that she would stay.

## CHAPTER XXI

### BITTER FRUIT

MALVERN was at some pains to be as affable as he could in the days which followed. The nights were cooler now and the sharp, bracing mornings a keen delight. Gloria admitted to herself that she was happier than she had been since coming north. Anne, however, watched Malvern with a coldly speculative eye.

The Warrens were frankly "fed up" with the north, and if business interests had not dictated their conduct for them they would have left before September was half over. As for Brom, he was boisterously happy. The north suited him perfectly and with Ducharme he often roamed abroad.

Malvern began at an early date to make preparations for the grouse shooting. He had a small lodge on the uplands about twenty-five

miles east of Bois Blanc which he used only at this season. It was his intention to have Gloria and the others go with him for a week. The Warrens never quite said they would go, and when it came time to start, they backed out with several excuses.

Gloria had been interested at first, but Anne's studied references to Pierre as a "guide" and servant had led her to give up any thought of going.

Anne's slighting remarks had not been voiced in Ducharme's presence, it seems almost needless to add. Brom had taken her to task for them, for from Antoine he had heard something of the truth concerning the trip she had taken with Pierre. Naturally Anne refused to admit that there was anything vindictive in her manner.

Malvern had been genuinely interested in having Brom along, and when he suddenly declared that he preferred to stay at Bois Blanc, Jim had been very much piqued. Determined

now that he should not be done out of his grouse shooting, he announced that he and Anne would go if they had to go alone.

There was no dissenting voice to this, so accordingly Jim and Anne, with Pierre and Amiel, set out for the eastern edge of Malvern's preserve.

Anne realized that she had overplayed her hand, for it had been her intention to so shame Ducharme by snubbing him that he would have more than paid for what he had done to her. To succeed in this she had to have an audience, but denied one, she could not forego putting him in his place (as she saw it) at every opportunity.

Ducharme had surmised her intent before they left and he met her sallies with a smile. Of course nothing else could have so infuriated her or tempted her to further indignities and Pierre realized as much.

Malvern could hardly have been blind to this pass at arms, but in his concern over the shoot-

ing he failed to comment on the matter. He had several very fine dogs. Early the following morning Ducharme and he were afield. The grouse were fairly plentiful. Eastern Canada seldom enjoys a finer day than the one which smiled on them. The fields had turned brown and already the trees were bedecking themselves in yellow and red for their whirling dance with death.

A haze as of October hung in the air. Pungent earthy smells reached the nostrils. Malvern lost himself in the pleasure of the day. For the first time that year Ducharme and he approached their old footing.

It may have been fancy on Pierre's part, but he could not help feeling that Malvern returned to the lodge reluctantly.

Anne met them a short distance from the cabin. Amiel had accompanied Jim and Ducharme, so she had been left to her own company for the day and she had evidently been impatiently awaiting their return for some time.

Malvern was in high spirits and did his best to placate her for their late return.

"I'll go along to-morrow," Anne announced; "Ducharme can teach me how to shoot."

"I'll be delighted to have you," Jim answered. "I'm sure Pierre will not mind."

"Mind?" Ducharme queried, rather surprised at Malvern's condescension. "Why, I'll be quite willing to do all I can. The dogs will get down to work in earnest in the morning. Have you ever shot over dogs?"

"I've never shot over anything," Anne retorted sharply.

"You'll find it something of a trick," Malvern cut in. "For God's sake, Anne, don't shoot one of my dogs; they stand me a pretty figure."

"You are very anxious to have me go along, aren't you?" she asked sarcastically.

It was an embarrassing moment all around.

"Of course I want you to come," Malvern asserted, refusing to lose patience for once. "You'll be ready by daybreak?"

"Daybreak? That sounds dreadfully early to me. Certainly it isn't necessary to leave as early as that."

"But it is," expostulated Malvern. "Don't be a killjoy, Anne. You'll get a thrill out of it. Cheer up now. Amiel will have supper ready in no time."

Pierre excused himself and left Malvern to placate her. Just why Anne should have felt that Ducharme was responsible for Malvern's insistence it is impossible to say, but at supper and during the evening she let him see with what dislike she regarded him.

Malvern was so thoroughly tired that he soon went to bed. Pierre and Amiel found several things to do, so Anne retired much against her wish. As Pierre left her he could not help wondering what Malvern found attractive about her. For the first time he became careless of whether or not she realized in what disdain he held her.

Anne caught his look, and with flashing eyes

she turned away resolved to be revenged. Pierre sensed the threat, and in the hour that Amiel and he sat outside it was never far from his mind.

The lodge was so arranged that the bedrooms gave out upon the veranda which ran along the front of the building, excepting one for the cook which was in the rear next to the kitchen. Anne had been given one of the corner rooms, and Malvern occupied the other. Ducharme's room was between the two. Amiel was visibly surprised when Pierre told him they would exchange rooms for the night.

"The little room off the kitchen is hot," Amiel protested.

"I shall not mind it," Pierre replied. "We will be the first awake in the morning. No one need know about this. This is just a whim of mine, Amiel."

Amiel was not so easily fooled, but it was not for him to question Ducharme. He would have as willingly stood up for the night had Pierre

asked him to. Indeed, to tell the truth, suspicions that were as yet vague in Ducharme's mind had crystalized in Amiel's. Pierre believed Anne capable of going to any length to compromise him, but he was far from suspecting that she was even then deliberately planning to undo him and make his further retention by the Malverns impossible, unless Gloria plead his cause, thereby lending color to the very argument Malvern hoped to use against both of them.

Man of the open though he was, Pierre found himself quite as ready for sleep as Malvern had when he finally reached his bed. Hours later—midnight at least—a wild, despairing cry for help brought him to his feet. He recognized almost instantly that it was Anne who was calling.

“Jim! Jim!” she cried, “make him stop!”

The almost forgotten Indian strain in Ducharme blazed in his eyes as he listened to Anne's well-simulated cry. He could imagine

what had happened. He knew the mortification that would be hers before this little game had been played out would be more than a woman should be asked to bear, but he refused to lift a finger to save her.

Malvern called out excitedly a second later. A door flung back angrily and the rush of bare feet along the veranda told Pierre that the climax to this farce must come soon. It proclaimed as much to Anne, and she was quite ready for it, never questioning the success of her mean intrigue.

She had waited until she was sure that every one but herself was sound asleep before stirring from her own room. The doors—thin affairs that the average man could break down—were never locked. She tiptoed to the door of the room next her own and listened. The sound of deep breathing reached her. She listened again to be sure.

Standing there in the moonlight she ripped and tore her thin nightgown and dishevelled her

hair. No further preparation was necessary. Slipping into Ducharme's room she fastened the sliding bolt on the door and shrieked. And now Malvern was outside demanding to know what had happened.

"Get me out of here, Jim;" she screamed.  
"Break down the door, it's locked!"

"My God how did you get in there?" Malvern shouted.

Anne did not answer him, but to an imaginary Pierre she cried:

"Let me go! Oh, let me go!"

Malvern did not wait. He put his shoulder to the door and snapped the bolt. Anne staggered out into his arms.

"Jim," she sobbed, "this is terrible, terrible——"

"But what happened? How do you come to be in Ducharme's room?"

"He carried me in there," she lied, the tears running down her cheeks. "The beast——"

Malvern was properly indignant.

"Go back to your room," he said to her, "I'll settle this with him."

Anne made no move to obey. She knew it required her presence to make her charge convincing. Malvern had jammed the switch on his pocket flashlight in his excitement, but he got it to working again and stepped inside. A gasp of astonishment was wrung from him as he beheld Amiel, still asleep, or feigning to be, in Ducharme's bed. He shook the man roughly and hurled almost incoherent questions at him.

"Pierre ask me to sleep here to-night," Amiel protested. "He is in my room."

"You've been in here all night?"

"Yes, I have been here all the time." Amiel's face was very sober, and it was not by habit a sober countenance.

"You—bolted the door before you went to bed?" Malvern asked with growing caution.

"No, I never bolt the door. Why should I lock the door?"

"All right, it doesn't matter," said Jim. "Go back to sleep." He went out and closed the door behind him. Anne was waiting, her bosom heaving with genuine emotion now.

"So Ducharme carried you in there, eh?" Malvern queried coldly.

"I—I must have been walking in my sleep," Anne said between sobs. "I—I don't know how else to explain—"

"Evidently Ducharme knew you'd have an attack like this to-night. Very fortunate for him, I should say."

"Oh, please, Jim, don't take that tone with me," Anne begged. She was an appealing figure, silhouetted against the moon, her milk-white flesh as smooth as marble. She put her arms around Malvern's neck and raised her lips to him. It was the age-old trick of the sorceress, but it was potent as usual. Malvern began to offer advice. "Forget Ducharme," he said; "he is necessary to both of us. If you keep this up he'll walk right out of the trap. I'll not mention

this to him in the morning, and you had better not, either.”

“How I hate him,” Anne whispered. “I’ll do anything to hurt him.”

“Even to marrying me?”

“Yes, I’ll even promise that.”

## CHAPTER XXII

### TEMPTATION

MALVERN and Pierre were ready to leave the lodge a full hour before the sun came up the next morning. Anne had slept but an hour or two, so it was a very sleepy response that Malvern got when he called her.

"We'll wait a few minutes if you really want to go along," he told her. "Amiel is getting breakfast. Do you think you want to try it?"

"Let me sleep another hour, Jim," she begged. "I'll surely be ready then."

Malvern's answer was non-committal. He and Ducharme ate their breakfast almost in silence. When they had finished he said to Pierre:

"I'm going along now with Amiel. You'll know where to find us. We'll take the dogs,

and when Miss Cabot is ready the two of you can follow. You don't mind?"

Pierre smiled dryly. "It is agreeable to me," said he, "if you think Miss Cabot will not object."

"I guess that'll be all right. We are going to be here only a day or two; I don't want to be cheated out of the shooting."

Anne heard them leave. She came to her door and on seeing Pierre sitting upon the veranda she called to him.

"They are not going to wait?"

"I'm to wait for you," he answered. "You can sleep as long as you care to. We can find them later on."

"Mr. Malvern suggested that?"

"Why, of course, I—"

Anne did not wait for him to finish but closed the door, her eyes flashing fire. Angry as she was, she was soon fast asleep again and noon had come before she reappeared.

Ducharme was eating a bite as she entered

the combination living and dining-room. He got up and bowed.

"I'll get you something to eat, if you care to have me," said he, "and we can get along."

"Oh, I've changed my mind," Anne replied. "I could eat something, if you'd be so kind."

Her face bore no trace of the restless night she had put in. She actually gave Ducharme an ingratiating smile as he placed the food before her.

The wooden expression on Ducharme's face did not change.

"You are quite sure you won't go," he inquired.

"Quite," Anne answered briefly.

Pierre went out without answering. When Anne had finished eating she came upon the veranda to catch sight of him a mile away from the lodge walking toward the hills to the east.

It grew uncomfortably warm during the afternoon. Flies buzzed about the hammock swung on the veranda. The book which Anne

had picked up failed to hold her, and bored with herself she finally got up and wandered off into the woods. There was a small lake several miles east of the lodge deep in a clump of spruce. It was a retreat that a hermit might have envied. Anne had been there before and it drew her again this afternoon.

Deep, velvety moss covered the ground at its edge. Thankful for shade and unbroken quiet of the place she threw herself down and let her thoughts wander where they would.

For the first time in the weeks she had been north she actually found herself alone. She had laughed at the others when they had admitted the spell the great woods had cast over them, but in a measure it touched her now. Stirred by a sudden impulse she undressed and stepped into the cold, crystal-clear water.

A red-breasted woodpecker stopped his tapping to stare at her. And well he might, for she was ravishingly beautiful as she swam

about the tiny lake, her bobbed hair a deep black against the blueness of the water. She stopped and blew him a kiss from her saucy lips.

Minutes later as she was wading ashore the afternoon sun peeked through an opening in the dense foliage. Anne caught her full-length reflection in the water. She stopped and surveyed herself as critically as a painter does his canvas.

She realized her beauty. To her it spelled power—unfailing power—the force by which she had always brought men to her feet, appealing to the beast in them and holding them at bay as it pleased her to do.

She ran her long white hands through her hair and let the wind dry it. With something of regret she slipped into her filmy underthings.

There it was that Ducharme lost in thought stumbled upon her. He was not aware of her until he was within a few feet of the spot where she stood. His surprise was complete. Dislike

her though he did, for a fleeting second her beauty captured and held him. With eyes half closed he turned away. Anne called him when she had finished dressing.

"Come here, Pierre," she said entreatingly, "and sit down beside me; I want to talk to you." He did not answer at once.

"I didn't know you were here," said he embarrassedly.

"Of course you didn't, or wild horses could not have dragged you to the spot. Tell me, do you really hate me so much?"

"I would hardly express it that way," Ducharme murmured lamely.

Anne's tone had lost its imperiousness. Indeed her present mood was such that Ducharme appealed to her strongly, and in a way she would have believed impossible heretofore. Once she had attempted to play with him, but now, if she could have managed it, she would have liked nothing better than to have brought him to her feet and held him there charmed.

She exerted all the coquetry she had at her command, and it piqued her not to find an answering gleam in his moody eyes.

"You are quite aware of what happened last night, aren't you?" she asked with growing petulance.

"I am quite willing to forget," he answered.

"You can afford to say that. You must realize how cheap I made myself. Why don't you tell me I deserved what I got?"

Pierre did not answer. Anne saw him pause and she quickly added:

"Don't tell me you are sorry for me. I couldn't stand that."

"I am not sorry for you," Ducharme murmured. "I wonder only at your reasons."

"And I wonder what made you suspect me. You are deep, aren't you? It makes me smile to think of the others taking you for an unsophisticated countryman. You're not that, Pierre. Anyhow, I'm glad you tricked me. It wouldn't have been very pleasant for you, other-

wise. I'm going to admit that I've treated you abominably. Promise me that you'll forget. Let us make a fresh start, eh?"

She reached out and brushed the hair back from his forehead. She saw Ducharme's body grow tense. It brought a sigh from her.

"I had to come here in the woods to be humbled," she whispered. "I want you to appreciate that fact. I've been wearied with men; they've pursued me. I've had but to raise my eyes to have them come running. I guess that is why I resented you—you showed me too plainly how little I meant to you. . . . Am I really so unattractive in your eyes; isn't there anything about me that appeals to you?"

Ducharme looked up for the first time in minutes. Her lips were an invitation. They were his if he cared to take them.

"You—call this a fresh start?" he asked unevenly. He shook his head as if finding his own answer. "I am still the plaything," he added.

“No, Pierre, don’t say that!” Anne exclaimed. “There’s something wild—untamed—in you that grips me.”

“My Indian blood, perhaps,” Ducharme laughed mirthlessly.

“You are cruel,” Anne murmured, her lips trembling. “Tell me, Pierre—you are not in love with another?”

Ducharme gazed at her sharply, his face whitening, trying to fathom her purpose.

“You almost answer my question without speaking,” Anne exclaimed. “I suspected this long ago. Don’t be a fool, Pierre; Gloria Malvern can never mean anything to you.”

“No!” he exclaimed, catching her wrists roughly. “You are putting words into my mouth. I have only the deepest respect for Mrs. Malvern. She has been very gracious to me. Whatever you do, don’t repeat this madness to another. I could never forgive you.”

He had not realized how deep his fingers

were cutting into her wrists until tears of pain welling up in Anne's eyes arrested him. He released her hands hurriedly.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," he muttered gruffly.

"Oh, I *want* you to hurt me," she cried passionately. "Make me obey you, Pierre! Why do you turn away? Look at me! Look at me, you wonderful—"

She stopped abruptly as something moved in the underbrush. Ducharme had heard the sound too. He expected nothing else than that Malvern would confront them the next second. It was not Jim, however, but one of his dogs. He and Amiel could not be far off.

Desperate, Anne caught Ducharme's hand and crushed it against her lips.

"Promise me you will be here to-morrow," she entreated. Say that you will meet me here!"

Ducharme just stared at her. Anne dropped his hand at last. His eyes held her as though she were hypnotized. The sternness of Pierre's

face partly concealed his disgust, but it could not hide his anger.

“Do not insist,” he said grimly, “for I may come, and if I do it shall be for but one purpose. The price I shall ask, and insist upon getting, will not be one you will care to pay.”

This was frank enough for Anne. For the moment she knew not how to answer, and the sigh which escaped her as Malvern came through the brush was almost one of relief.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### OUT OF REACH

MALVERN was not at all pleased at finding them together in such a romantic spot, nor did Anne's evident nervousness escape him. Wonderingly he glanced from her to Ducharme, trying to read from their attitude some hint of what had passed between them. Wisely enough he said nothing.

Anne's flaming passion had so carried her away that had Malvern chided her at the moment she most certainly would have been through with him forever, and this in spite of the fact that she hardly meant what she had said to Ducharme. Rather, she did not believe that she meant it (and she undoubtedly did not), but her madness had put a spell upon her, and for the time being she was the slave of her self-awakened appetite.

"I slept until noon, Jim," she said by way of explanation. "I knew it was foolish to start out then. Did you have a good day?"

"No kick at all. The dogs worked to perfection. I got some nice birds. By the way, Pierre, do you mind cooking them? You can do something to a grouse that's beyond Amiel."

"I've heard about your cooking," Anne exclaimed. "Don't refuse; I'm ravenous."

"You flatter me, I'm afraid; it is nothing. If Amiel has eggs enough, I'll cook the grouse. Shall we get along?"

They met Amiel a short distance away. Ducharme chose to walk with him. Their pace gradually took them away from Anne and Malvern. Amiel tried unsuccessfully to engage Pierre in conversation. He shot a furtive glance at the big man but Ducharme's face was a mask. Only the tightness of his mouth gave any hint of the turmoil that seethed within him. He was not oblivious to the physical lure of Anne. Few men could have been, and yet, he

berated himself for a weakling for having allowed her to arouse him to his present pitch.

Well enough he knew that the cup of pleasure which she offered would be dashed from his lips did he but try to sip its contents. He recognized the gesture for what it was, and it made him hate her. He winced as he recalled what she had said about Gloria. What a world of difference there was between the two!

He asked himself if her coupling his name with Gloria's could have been anything but a shot in the dark. Surely he had done nothing to warrant the suspicion. Or had he? In spite of every precaution had he unwittingly revealed his regard for her who meant so much to him? A cold, numbling fear crept over him with the thought. He had hardly admitted even to himself that Gloria Malvern had wrenched the heart from his body. How, then, could the others know?

"Pierre," Amiel muttered grimly as they reached the lodge, "these people will be gone

soon. Another two weeks and we will have the woods to ourselves."

Amiel made the suggestion in all kindness, but it sent a dart into Ducharme's heart . . . another two weeks and they would be gone . . . how well he knew it. Either he must go with them as he had promised, or Gloria would pass out of his life. In his way, he knew it would be wiser to bow to fate and let her go, but that called for courage he did not possess.

Amiel did not know that he had given his promise. Time enough to tell him when the day came. Moodily he set about preparing the grouse.

Malvern had lingered behind with Anne. Conversation proved a rather difficult thing.

"I hope you haven't antagonized him further to-day," he said at last.

"What made you think I had?" Anne queried arrogantly.

"He's not himself. You know, Anne, you don't begin to understand Ducharme. He's not

an ignorant backwoodsman. And he's not gullible either. I got a word or two from Antoine about what happened at his cabin last month. It should have taught you a lesson."

"Well—perhaps it did."

"You wouldn't have dared anything as far fetched as you did last night if you had. He knows you are trying to get even—that you are only playing with him."

"So?" Anne laughed ironically. "I wonder if I am," she added musingly.

Malvern looked at her in amazement.

"Don't be ridiculous, Anne," he exclaimed. "Take him away from these woods and he'll be unromantic enough."

"You sound as if you might be jealous," Anne replied. Her answer exasperated Malvern.

"Jealous?" he echoed. "My God! Should I be jealous of my guide? Why—I half believe you were making love to him when I found you back at the lake."

"Well—what if I were?"

"You admit, eh?"

"I don't deny it."

Malvern was so beside himself that he could not speak for the moment.

"Listen, Anne," he muttered finally, "there's a limit to my patience. I'll not be made ridiculous to Ducharme."

"We are what we are, Jim, I fancy neither of us fool him very much."

"You don't mean to tell me that you are in love with him?"

Anne shook her head. "No," she murmured, almost regretfully, "I'm not; but I almost wish I were. I know I am not fooling him, and I am not fooling myself, either. I'm playing with fire; I know it. He burns into me at times."

"It's rotten of you to string him along like this," Malvern declared bitterly.

"I guess it only amuses him. He is head over heels in love with Gloria."

"What?"

"Absolutely, Jim. He gave himself away completely this afternoon."

For the moment Malvern seemed not to know whether to be pleased or hurt at this information. Anne caught his feeling.

"That is exactly what you wanted, isn't it?" she asked with devilish frankness.

The taunt brought an answering shot from Malvern.

"I wonder if that explains your interest in him," said he.

Anne could afford to smile now.

"Perhaps it does," she laughed. "He is quite insensible to me."

The admission afforded Malvern a degree of relief.

"It doesn't matter—not really, Anne. Why not keep your hands off? You'll drive him away just when I am about to succeed."

"And but a second ago you dared to tell me how rottenly I was treating him. You amuse me, Jim."

“Well, I don’t deny the rottenness of my scheme. At least, Anne, give me credit for that. And I’m doing it for you, too—for both of us. Don’t forget that, Anne.”

“I guess you’ll see that I don’t,” Anne’s tone was less than vindictive but it caused Malvern to regard her shrewdly. He wondered if her words held more than idle talk. He put his arms around her and forced her to look up at him.

“We are not going to quarrel, are we dear?” he murmured tensely.

“Of course not. I tell you Ducharme is not interested in me.”

“But if he were?”

“Well,—but what’s the use? Still, I almost envy Gloria. Not that anything will come of it, she’s such an innocent. But I’m woman enough to want to have a man care for me the way he cares for her.”

The words were barbed, and they sunk deeper into Malvern’s consciousness than Anne

intended. Conversation died between them. The grouse proved up to Pierre's reputation, but it was a silent and altogether cheerless meal.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FLAMING FOREST

ANNE's train of thought as she went off to sleep concerned Ducharme quite to the exclusion of Malvern. In a dream-world she saw herself foregoing any thought of Malvern's wealth and making a supreme effort to win Pierre's love. Even in dreams, however, she recognized the element of sacrifice entailed. But she could not be blamed too much for that—life had been shaping her course quite relentlessly. Certain material things which were luxuries to many were to her grim necessities. She had to have money. . . . How else could one do as they pleased?

Dry, pungent wood-smoke drifting in through the open window awakened her an hour after midnight. She sat up in bed, sniffing

the air enquiringly. Her first thought was that the lodge was afire. She dismissed the fear almost immediately, quickly realizing that whatever was burning was a long distance away, for a thin haze floated in the moonlight filtering down through the trees. Reassured, she went back to sleep, but not for long.

When she sat up the second time she listened anxiously. The smoke was heavier, and from the veranda came the low droning of voices. Hastily throwing on a light wrap she went to the door and peeked out. Ducharme and Amiel sat upon the steps staring off across the woods and meadows. Their tone was serious.

Anne caught their anxiety.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked, coming up to them. Amiel and Pierre started to get up but she told them not to bother.

"It's too early to say whether it's serious or not, but there is a lot of smoke pouring down from the northeast."

"It couldn't put us in danger here, could it?"

Amiel laughed. Ducharme stopped him with a glance.

"The woods are very dry," he said. "We hardly ever get by without a fire or two at this time of the year. We've been sitting here for an hour waiting for the fire to top that ridge. When it does we will be able to see how serious the danger is."

"There is danger, then?" Anne's voice was steady enough but her eyes revealed her uneasiness.

"There may not be," Pierre replied honestly. "If the wind does not come up the blaze may peter out; they often do. There is so much open country east of us that I wouldn't give this smoke a second thought if it were from that quarter. To the northeast there is pretty solid second-growth timber."

"Have you said anything to Mr. Malvern?"

"Not yet. Time enough to wake him when we know what is up. There isn't anything we can do at present. If the blaze is serious, we

will have to run. We can backfire around the lodge and save it, perhaps, but we'd not be able to stay here; the smoke would make short work of us."

Amiel had left them alone as they talked. Anne sat down beside Pierre and cupped her hands about her chin. Ducharme glanced at her rather searchingly.

"I hope I haven't alarmed you," he said a moment later, and his tone was kindlier than Anne had expected.

"I'm not afraid," she answered, continuing to stare at the distant ridge which screened the oncoming fire, "I know you'll get us out no matter what happens."

Pierre smiled to himself.

"You take a great deal for granted, don't you?"

"I don't know that I do. You have a way of compelling confidence in your ability to do the right thing at the right time. I haven't forgotten how you fished Gloria out of the

river. Really, you have been horribly efficient, Pierre."

Ducharme made no attempt to reply, and it was only after several minutes had passed that Anne added:

"You'll be quite a hero if you show up at Bois Blanc with the rest of us in tow, providing this fire proves really serious."

It was an unfortunate remark, and Anne realized it almost as soon as the words had left her tongue. She saw Pierre draw away. She caught him quickly.

"I didn't mean it that way," she said imploringly. "Don't be offended with me, Pierre. I know you don't go in for heroics. No matter what I've thought of you, I've never accused you of that. But you did save Gloria when there didn't seem to be a chance for it, and if you have to lug us out of the woods now it will just about confirm your position as a superman with the rest of us."

This explanation seemed to mollify Du-

charme. He offered Anne a cigarette and they sat there smoking without a word passing between them for the better part of an hour.

The portentous red glow creeping toward them from the northeast advanced. All at once, or so it seemed, a thin, wavering red line topped the distant ridge for miles. Here and there the flames leaped high and then subsided to advance down the valley like a well-trained line of shock troops going into battle.

"I—I guess we'd better call Mr. Malvern," said Pierre.

Anne turned to stare at Ducharme. "You mean it's serious, then?" she queried with sudden apprehension.

"It looks bad. If the wind comes up, and it undoubtedly will, we're in for it. That fire has been burning for days. Amiel caught the first sign of it early this morning."

"Why didn't you say something about it?"

"You were hardly in the mood to listen to me this morning," Pierre answered patiently.

"If I had told you, you would have been

worried, and the hunting would have been ruined for the day. As it is, we'll not have to leave until daylight, perhaps not then."

"Well, sit here. I'm immensely thrilled. I wish Amiel and Malvern were back at Bois Blanc; I'd like to face this alone with you."

Danger signals glowed in Ducharme's eyes. Anne recognized them.

"No, Pierre," she murmured, "don't draw away; I'm not going to make love to you: I realize the hopelessness of that."

It was almost the truth, but the desire to cover his warm, red lips with mad, burning kisses tortured her. Yearning crept into her eyes. Ducharme read their message as clearly as though she had put her thought into words. He looked away, and it was not with the confusion of youth but with a feeling of fear. Impulses that he had throttled struggled for mastery in him.

And Anne, wise as only a woman of her kind can be wise in the ways of men, sensed the struggle going on within him. Insidiously she

edged closer and closer to him until her soft, yielding flesh touched him through the thin folds of her robe. She felt a tremor pass over Ducharme. His throat was dry. He wanted to get up, to get away, to leave this woman forever, but invisible chains bound him to the spot. And there they sat, speaking not but saying everything, as man and woman have ever done.

Ducharme broke the spell at last, and his words were quite meaningless to Anne at first.

"You know that I'm going to New York," he muttered. "You've been told, I suppose?"

"I heard that you had been invited," Anne answered, wondering where the question might lead.

"Well, I am going to go," Pierre went on. "I was just thinking how ridiculous this moment will seem to both of us when we look back at it from the social stronghold." His voice was bitter. "I hope we'll find it ridiculous for the same reason."

Anne did not smile. "I hope so too," she murmured, her voice low and charged. "Ridiculous is hardly the word, though, Pierre. Closed incidents are sometimes neither amusing nor ridiculous.

"You are honest, now," Pierre mused: "this is, as you say, but an incident. But even that is more than I supposed it to be."

"And what *did* you suppose it to be?"

"Playing—just a game at my expense."

"And you've changed your mind?" Anne's voice was so low he barely heard. He nodded his head slowly in answer, communing with himself.

"And your name for it now?"

Ducharme hesitated.

"Madness—of a sort," he murmured then; "it's an easy name for it. And that is why it will be ridiculous to you—you'll wonder just how much you meant it, and how much I believed you."

"You take for granted that it cannot last?"

"No, no." Ducharme's laugh made Anne shiver. "You progress from the future to the present, now," he went on. "A guide—an Indian guide—that's how you will think of me,—a sort of superservant, perhaps."

For some inexplicable reason Anne wanted to cry. Tears over a lost cause,—it was an appealing thought.

"Why aren't you rich?" she whispered tremulously.

"It would make no difference."

The truth of this was undeniable. It silenced her for a moment. She thought of Gloria, and hated her cordially. Her train of thought was reflected in the bitterness which hardened her mouth.

"And yet, if it were not for another," she murmured, "it might make a difference."

Ducharme understood her perfectly, but he said nothing. After a time, it was Anne who spoke.

"Perhaps ridiculous will be the word for it,"

said she. "Tell me, when you think of me, what will it be?"

"I—shall not think of you, mademoiselle." Ducharme's manner was matter-of-fact, even disarming. "Closed incidents are best forgotten."

He got up and offered Anne an assisting hand.

"Perhaps it would be well for you to catch an hour's sleep if possible. We most certainly will be leaving by daylight."

"You are suddenly sure of it?" Anne answered.

"I wondered if you had failed to hear the sounds that have been reaching us for half an hour. You evidently have. Moose and deer have been rushing past the lodge for thirty minutes. Take my word for it, when they move before a fire it's time to go."

Anne was on her feet staring into the timber. Shadowy forms slipped by. Ducharme pointed out a lynx bounding along noiselessly.

"Thank God, we've little to pack," Anne gasped. "I can be ready in ten minutes."

"Amiel and I will not be ready to leave as soon as that. The wind is coming up. Can't you feel it? We'll set the brush afire around the lodge. Mr. Malvern and you can pack. I'll call him now. But don't become alarmed. We've plenty of time."

He turned and left her. Anne could not help another look at the advancing line of fire, now galloping toward the lodge as rapidly as a man runs. She fancied she could hear its roar already, though it was still miles away. To be calm and unhurried in the face of such a menace was more than she could accomplish.

## CHAPTER XXV

### CHANCE

THE few minutes that it took Anne to dress and gather together the few things she had brought with her brought Malvern to her room, his face an unnatural white.

"Don't bother about packing up!" he exclaimed excitedly, "we haven't a minute to lose."

Anne looked at him in amazement.

"Pierre tells me we have plenty of time," she cried.

"He tells me the same thing, but he's too sure of himself. You can hear the trees going down already. Wait until you have a look."

"I've been sitting outside for over an hour with him, watching the fire," she answered.

"You have?" Malvern's surprise was piti-

ful. "No wonder you take it so easily. But I warn you, Anne, don't take things so damn calmly. Ducharme wouldn't let us see what he really thinks. He might have called me when he discovered the fire."

"I wouldn't take him to task about it," Anne said pointedly. "If we get out alive it will be because of him. It strikes me he is going to be quite an important person for the next few hours."

"He'll do what I tell him to do," Malvern declared angrily.

"I wonder. I wouldn't insist on it, Jim. Besides, I'm not quite ready to die here in the wilds of Quebec. I know the story would give some friends of ours a breakfast thrill, say day after to-morrow morning, but I refuse to oblige." Anne's tone suddenly changed from one of bantering to deadly seriousness. "I warn you, don't be a fool. And don't expect me to follow you; I know Ducharme will get us out if it can be done. I follow him."

“Well, do you know he is not going to strike for the river? He says he will take us south and counter on the wind. Does that sound like sense to you?”

“I don’t know!” Anne was rapidly losing her temper. “I wouldn’t question you on the Street, and I’ll not question Ducharme in the woods. If he says go south, it’s enough for me.”

Malvern cursed under his breath. “Why, he exclaimed, “he tells me Amiel spotted smoke early this morning, that he didn’t say anything to me because he didn’t want to spoil the shooting. Good God! am I a child to be pampered like that? This is my place, he is working for me! You make a hero out of him.”

“Unfortunately, he doesn’t think so.” Pierre’s entrance stopped the argument abruptly.

“We can go now, if you are ready,” he said evenly. “We have the brush burning all around us. The circle will close in a few minutes. Are you ready?”

Jim nodded. Anne answered for herself.

"Amiel can carry my stuff," Malvern declared when Pierre signalled them to follow him.

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to pack your own things," he said flatly. "I'll take Miss Cabot's. The rest of us will have to shoulder the other bags."

Malvern glared at him. "Are you giving the orders, or am I?" he asked hotly.

Pierre met his eyes squarely.

"I regret that you should have to ask that question," he said with chilling emphasis. "I took it for granted that at such a moment you would look to me—I felt that it was part of my responsibility. But since you question it, why, I am quite willing you should follow your own judgment. I must tell you, however, that this fire is a serious one. The wind is rising all the time. You will see before long that many little fires are starting,—pieces of burning bark as big as your hand are in the air. The deer

are swift, but the fire will outstrip them before they reach the river. The timber is thick between here and the Saguenay. To the south there are openings, some water and a fairly good trail. It is suicide to try for the river. But if you think safety lies that way—don't let me stop you. I'll go my way, and you go yours; but Miss Cabot should be permitted to say which one of us she will follow."

"What does Amiel say?" Malvern demanded sulkily.

"He agrees with me absolutely; he'll go with me."

"And so will I," Anne announced, "and I'm sure you will too, Jim."

Malvern agreed with a poor show of grace, and not because he was a coward who feared to risk the big woods by himself but because, for all his anger, he realized his own unfitness for the ordeal ahead. His pack weighed a full thirty-five pounds, guns included. No load for either Pierre or Amiel, but for him a heavy one.

He pitched it high upon his back and adjusted the tumpline with Pierre's assistance.

A word to Anne, and they came out on the veranda. The back-firing had gained in volume and now a space not over seventy-five yards wide, and rapidly growing less, separated the two ends of the circle of fire closing in about them. Anne coughed violently.

"The smoke will not be so heavy when we get beyond our own fire," Pierre told her. "Amiel will lead the way. You follow him, Miss Cabot. Mr. Malvern will be in back of you. I'll be last." He gave the word, and they started.

"Keep together," Ducharme warned. The smoke was so thick that it was almost impossible to see ahead for over a few feet. Malvern stumbled once, but Pierre caught him before he fell.

"We'll be out of this in a few minutes," said he. "Don't hang back."

A shout from Amiel told Pierre that he had reached the comparative safety and comfort

beyond the backfire. With eyes smarting and tears running down their cheeks Malvern and Ducharme soon joined the other two. They stopped for a moment that Anne might catch her breath.

“Follow Amiel, now,” Pierre said to her. “If you should lose sight of him, call out. Don’t run; we’ve got to save our strength. It will be daylight in another hour. We can go faster then.”

Strung out in Indian file, they moved on through the forest. Rabbits and other small animals brushed past them in the darkness. From afar the roaring of the flames reached them. The rising wind rustled through the leaves and turned them up as if preparing them for the fate so soon to be theirs.

Perspiration broke on Pierre. The double pack he carried irritated him more by its bulk than weight. He was grateful when they reached the first opening. It was less than half a mile across, but it brought cooler air and a

slight lifting of the smoke pall which licked the moisture from tongue and lips.

Animals, insects, birds—each seemed to sense what impended, all save the treetoads; they droned their monotonous song as of old.

Amiel had halted for Ducharme to join the others. Anne caught the glance the two exchanged. It carried a question and an answer, and the answer was not encouraging. Pierre spoke to her the next moment.

“Are you beginning to tire?”

“No, I’m all right,” Anne answered, brushing her damp hair with her hands. “I’m terribly thirsty, though.”

“We’ll have water in ten minutes. There are several springs just beyond.

“The fire is gaining on us,” Malvern declared.

“I expected it would. It will gain on us until we are out of danger. We are passing right across its path. The gamble I am taking is that we can reach burnt-over land before it catches up with us. I still believe our chance is good.”

He gave the word and Amiel started on again, and the others followed. They were ascending a rise of ground now, and when they reached the crest they were able for the first time to look back and see the full sweep of the fire. For miles the forest was ablaze. Marching up hill and down it came on apace.

Great sparks would fly skyward. Little fires would flame. In a matter of minutes they would grow and soon become a part of the wall of fire advancing so relentlessly.

So thrilled was Anne at the spectacle that she quite forgot to be afraid. Ducharme forgave her a lot as he gazed at her. Only Malvern was untouched by the sight of the blazing world below them. His body ached already from the pack he carried. He was thirsty, his eyes smarted and the tumpline burned his forehead. One of the dogs brushed against him. Angrily he kicked the animal out of his way.

"Where is the spring?" he cried. "Don't let us stand here, this pack is breaking my back."

At the bottom of the hill they found water. They dropped their packs and got down on hands and knees and wet their faces in the shallow pool. They were not the only ones afield looking for water. Even as they lay there a mink crawled toward them, its beady eyes reflecting the fire-glow. The animal stopped a few feet away, surveying them critically and seeming to ponder whether to run or hold its ground.

Ducharme knew that throughout the forest, wherever spring or rivulet trickled, the denizens of the woods were gathering, not only to drink, but to back into the water until only their nostrils showed. Even the cat tribe, sworn foe of water, would seek this means of escape. Some would live through, but most of them would die. To-morrow their blackened forms would give mute testimony of their losing fight.

When he had drunk his fill, Malvern went through his pack and got out his guns. Pierre

was watching him, understanding his intention.

"I'm going to save the guns and let the rest go," Malvern announced, his voice a grumble.

"Perhaps that's best," Pierre agreed.

Anne had been studying the sky. The glow seemed to be fading out of the heavens. She called Ducharme's attention to the fact.

"No, it's not that," said he, "the fire is not going down; it's breaking day. In another hour we'll not see any glow at all, but the fire will be there. Unless the wind shifts at dawn, I expect the timber will go all the way to the river."

"Bois Blanc isn't in any danger, eh?" asked Malvern.

"I wouldn't say that it was. Felix will know what to do."

"You think they know we are caught, then?" Anne asked.

"Not a doubt of it."

"They may try to reach us," Malvern exclaimed hopefully. Pierre checked him.

“They’ll know better than to attempt that,” said he. “Felix will depend on me to do the right thing, even as I depend on him. We’ll get along now. We can go faster, too, Amiel. When it gets light enough, we’ll run whenever the going is good enough.”

Amiel got his pack in place and started off without a word. Anne hung back for a moment.

“Tell me, Pierre, do you really think we’ve got a chance?” she asked earnestly, her eyes holding his.

Ducharme started to answer, but checked himself, and then, instead of the optimistic reply he had intended, he said:

“Just a chance—that’s all. If I had known how the wind would blow, we could have started earlier. As it is, we’ve got a chance—just a chance.”

“And you’ll tell me when that chance goes?”

“If you wish it—I shall.”

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A RACE FOR LIFE

DAYLIGHT came—yellow, smoke-laden. Hours passed. Only once more did they find water to appease their thirst and cool their bodies. Gum dripped from spruce and cedar. Malvern held up a fern, its leaves already withered from the hot blast which fanned it. That dull, roaring which had followed them since leaving the lodge gave way to distinct sounds. Time after time they heard the crashing of forest giants falling before the onslaught of the flames.

Ducharme's face was stern. He called the others to a halt in a clearing and bade them leave their packs. The ground fell away to the south of them. Pierre pointed to the fire slowly circling ahead of them.

"The wind has trapped us," he admitted as

he saw tree after tree leap into flames. "We can't get out that way."

Amiel spoke to him in French. Anne followed their words, finding their French easily understood. Pierre turned to her, evidently unaware that she already knew what had been said.

"Amiel suggests that we follow the Micmac. It is the best we can do. There isn't much water in it here—we'll cross it in the valley below. Later on it becomes quite a stream. The first-growth timber has been pretty well cut off along its course. If the fire closes in ahead of us we can launch a log and run the river. There are rapids—one a bad one—we may not get past it alive; but it is a chance. There is no chance left any other way. . . . Tell me what you want to do."

"Whatever you want to do," Anne gasped. Her face was streaked with grime, her clothes were torn, and she was, altogether, far from the Anne Cabot of yesterday.

Pierre glanced at Malvern for his answer. Malvern nodded grimly.

“Run for it, then,” Pierre ordered.

It took them ten or twelve minutes to reach the creek. It looked harmless enough, gurgling over its white rocks. In many places there was nothing to do but wade through the water. That made their progress slow, but whenever it was possible to run Ducharme urged them on.

An hour of this proved to him that they were too late; half a mile ahead of them the circle of flames had closed.

Other creeks had joined the Micmac. It tumbled along with rising song now, its current so strong that Anne was almost swept off her feet.

“My God!” Malvern groaned. “We’re caught on every side. What are we going to do?” The fear of death was on him. He trembled and wet his lips with his tongue as he stared wildly about him.

“There’s nothing we can do but run the

rapids now," Pierre shouted back, in order to make himself heard. "Help me roll these logs into the water!"

Between them they soon had the two logs bobbing in the current. Pierre called Anne and strapped her on one of them.

"Hug the log; keep your arms around it and your head low. If it rolls over, roll with it."

He kicked off his boots then. Amiel had already bound Malvern to the other log, and he stood waiting for Pierre to start.

"Just a minute, Amiel," said Ducharme. From his pocket he took a handkerchief, and after wetting it, he tied it over Anne's face. "Keep it wet if you can," he advised, "it may save your eyes." And then to Malvern he continued:

"We'll go first. As soon as we are out of sight Amiel will push off after us. If we get through the flames and the rapids alive we can take it easy the rest of the way, The Micmac runs into the Saguenay below the Chute. If

anything happens to us, you go on. Understand?"

Both men nodded that they did. Pierre did not wait longer. He pushed the log out into the center of the stream, and the next moment it went shooting away. He clung to it savagely, his body strung out behind it to serve as a rudder.

The trees on either shore began to whirl by. Almost immediately the hot breath of the fire began to lick their faces. The leaves of bush and tree hung limp and dead. The river swung to the south. To ground the log now was to die. Pierre flung himself over with all his force. The unwieldy log lunged across the current. The next second it was around the bend safely, but before Ducharme's eyes there arose a solid wall of fire.

"Now!" he shouted. "Hold your head down!"

Anne could not see, but she could feel the blistering blast. In her ears an inferno roared

and boomed. To do her justice her pagan soul did not welch.

It grew hotter and hotter. Flames seemed to lick her skin. She felt the log lurch. A burning cedar had fallen into the stream. Ducharme grasped a flaming branch and swung the log clear.

Away it bounded. Spray leaped at him. They had reached the first of the rapids. . . . They were through them. The heat held—a second, two seconds. They dared not breathe.

The roaring passed then. Pierre lifted his head out of the water. “It’s all right!” he shouted, the words thick. “We’re through! Do you hear me?”

Anne’s fingers fumbled with the handkerchief, but she was so weak she could not untie it. Pierre saw, and he crept along the log until he reached her. He gave the handkerchief a jerk and ripped it off. Anne smiled at him wanly.

The rapids remained. They drew away from

the roaring of the flames to encounter a new danger. In the pitch to which he was keyed, Pierre felt supremely confident. His face and flame-seared hands were a throbbing fiery torture.

Dazed as she was, Anne realized that they neared the white water where death lurked. Suddenly, black, dripping rocks loomed beside her. Invisible hands tried to pluck her away from the trembling log. She had to open her eyes. There, directly in their path, arose two solid ledges of rock, the space between them so narrow she could have reached out her hands and touched both sides.

It seemed impossible that Ducharme could swing the log in time, or hold it to its course until they had passed safely through. She could not turn to see the superhuman effort he made. Dumbly thankful, she knew only that the log swerved to the right, that some force held it to its course, that the rocks slipped passed and that they floated serenely in the pool below.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### FAREWELL

PIERRE threw himself down upon the wet sand when he had beached the log. He was thoroughly spent with his effort. Anne's heart smote her as she gazed at him, his eyebrows burned off and great red welts on his face and hands. In appearance they were a sorry-looking pair. Appearances had always meant everything to her, but for once she rose above anything so petty. A great sense of gratitude filled her. She was not without a certain sense of shame, too, at her conduct these past weeks. It was penitence that would not last, of course.

Anne did not recognize this, however, having been penitent so seldom. She bent and kissed Pierre. The caress was passionless. Indeed such was her mood that she became the beneficiary of her own kiss. She felt raised, exalted,

as if a benediction had been pronounced over her.

The novelty of such an emotion recommended it to her. It carried no promise of devotion or faithfulness. It did not mean that in a month from now, or a week, or even a day, she would recognize it as binding. If the mood or cause showed itself she would undoubtedly hurt him, scheme against him and deliver him to his enemies.

She might even come to hate and despise him. Such a thought did not occur to her now, and if it had she would not have recognized it, for this moment was Ducharme's. For a few brief, fleeting seconds he was supreme. She felt actually humble before him, sensing a fineness in him which she could never attain.

Amiel waded ashore at her feet. She was not aware of him until he spoke to her. He carried Malvern in his arms, blood trickling from Jim's right temple, his face a deathly white beneath its coating of dirt.

"He's dead!" Anne screamed.

Pierre sat up wearily in time to see Amiel shake his head.

"No, he is not dead. His head strike a rock in the last *rapide*. Trees down all the way. We have pretty bad time."

Anne washed away the blood and poured handfuls of cold water on Malvern's face.

"He is coming to," Pierre announced, and then threw himself down to rest again without waiting to see his prophecy come true.

Malvern opened his eyes a minute later.

"We're safe," Anne said to him.

The expression on Malvern's face did not change for the longest while. "The tree," he whispered falteringly then, trying to point to the wound he had received.

"I know, the tree," said Anne. "You'll be all right in a minute or two. Try and rest. Pierre says we can walk to the river from here."

Amiel had thrown himself down on the sand,

and Anne did likewise now. Ten minutes later, although it seemed not half so long, Pierre bade them get up. Malvern's wound was still bleeding slightly. Anne bandaged it while they waited.

"It's not over two miles to the river," Pierre said to them. "We'll be out of the timber shortly." He looked very tired, his eyes deep in their sockets.

It was early afternoon before they found a boat. Once across the Saguenay, they set out for a tiny farm-house a mile above where they had crossed. The farmer, Isadore Besant, and his wife and all the little Besants came out to see them. Isadore was profane in his admiration for what they had accomplished. From him they borrowed a horse and wagon.

"You don't think the fire will leap the river, Isadore?" Pierre asked.

Isadore shrugged his shoulders. Truly one could not tell. His boat was ready, the family belongings packed. At the first sign of danger

he would order his family aboard and go down river.

Roughly, it was ten miles to Bois Blanc from Isadore's farm. The road hugged the river all the way. The current of air over the water caused the smoke to lift, but even so the opposite bank could not be seen. The racing fire was still some distance away from the shore, but the sound of its coming filled their ears.

"It's going to burn right to the river's edge," Malvern declared.

"I'm afraid so," Pierre admitted, "although the wind is shifting a bit."

The truth of this became apparent soon after.

"Thank God!" Pierre cried. "This side of the river is safe now."

The heartfelt exclamation caused Anne to glance at him sharply. She fancied she understood his relief. Thoughts of Gloria straightened her mouth into a sullen line.

The road was such that they must go slowly. A ringing shout some distance ahead of them

broke upon their ears several hours later. It was Felix. He ran up to them excitedly. He had always been a shy and untalkative person in the presence of Malvern and his guests, but he was far from being so now. He laughed and cried alternately as he embraced Ducharme. He seemed unable to believe that his eyes told him the truth.

It was some minutes before they could go on. Bois Blanc burst upon them at last—a white monument for the dead and blackened forest which had once been its pride. Where only yesterday there had been beauty was now only ugliness.

“We started to backfire this morning,” Felix explained apologetically, reading their thought.

“You did the right thing,” Pierre assured him. “It was the only way of being sure of saving the buildings.”

Anne noticed a movement on the wide veranda. A cry went up, and Gloria and Brom and the Warrens, followed by the servants in

a body, ran toward them. In that moment Anne forgot herself to stare at Ducharme. The light which kindled in his eyes as Gloria stopped before him was answer enough . . . and she laughed—the cold, mocking laughter that had so long been her weapon of defense.

“I knew you would make it,” Gloria exclaimed, her eyes shining. The movement of her lips told plainly how great an effort it was for her to hold herself back. “I wouldn’t give you up. Felix and I never gave up hope.”

This was said to all of them, but Anne fancied it was meant only for Ducharme. Surely it had been Pierre who had called forth her faith in their ability to win out.

They were deluged with questions. It covered an embarrassing moment for Gloria, and for Malvern, too, for the matter of that. Anne wondered if she were the only one who noticed that Jim was obviously courting the questions being put to him, in order to avoid Gloria. Anne had not expected them to rush into each

other's arms, nor was she prepared for Gloria's calm, dignified reserve, or for Malvern's ill-concealed fear of meeting his wife's eyes squarely.

It was Brom who stopped the flow of questions and insisted that they be put to bed at once. While they slept and nourishing foods were prepared for them, the incessant hum of voices arose from the veranda. The Warrens saw no need of staying on longer now. Brom agreed.

"I'm sure Gloria and Jim will get away as soon as possible," he declared. "It's going to be a day or two, though, before we can ask Anne to go."

"She seems to have stood the ordeal remarkably well," Warren murmured. What he really meant to say was that Anne appeared as if she had had a rather interesting day or two, and it was exactly this that the others understood him to be saying. Sue and Brom exchanged a knowing glance. Gloria joined them then, and

Brom promptly asked her if she had made any plans.

"We will have to go as soon as Anne and Jim and Pierre are fit to leave," she answered. "It doesn't seem as if I could get through another day here, everything is so black and dismal. I haven't the heart to stir away from the house."

This was but an echo of what the rest felt. Pierre found himself in high favor when he announced the following day that he felt quite himself again. Malvern left his bed on the second day, but Anne, who had apparently been the least touched by her experience, developed a case of nerves, and it was the end of the week before the launch was ordered to take them to Chicoutimi.

Pierre said nothing to his people about his leaving until the day of departure arrived. Antoine, Amiel, Maria, old Peter—all except Felix were so stunned by the news that they were unable to argue against his going.

"You are making a great mistake, Pierre," Felix declared. Pierre and he were alone in the boat-house at the time. "You do not understand these people; they do not understand you . . . and they will not even try to do so."

"Perhaps that is why I go, Felix," Pierre answered, his thoughts roaming back to the day he had spent with Gloria at the falls of the Au Sable. "I'm afraid we have never tried to understand them, either."

Felix laughed sarcastically. "Understand them? They do not understand themselves. Think . . . just another week and all the outsiders will be gone. We'll have the woods to ourselves again. We can smile and be happy, like we were! You know what we said at the election last spring . . . that next year it would be you that we would send to Ottawa. You must have forgotten."

Pierre's expression said clearly enough that he had not forgotten. He shook his head as he got up and turned to look across the river.

“No, Felix, it is not that I forget—I know that my place is here. And yet, I must go to-day. I have thought over this question for weeks. Always the answer has been the same . . . ‘You must go!’ I have always been frank with you, but for once I cannot be. This decision of mine is no sudden whim. I am not chasing rainbows, or even daring to dream . . . but something in here, Felix, makes me go.”

Something in his heart . . . Felix gazed at Ducharme with eyes eloquent with tenderness. The words that trembled on his tongue could not be said. Not that he was surprised . . . Pierre but confirmed a fear that had been his for weeks. The pity of it!

Felix was humble, close to the soil, but he could understand, for he was of a race that has always been swayed by romance.

It was Malvern's wish that Felix should be placed in charge during the winter. Matters had been talked over thoroughly, but even so, Felix gladly turned the conversation to this safe

channel again. It served to mask his emotion, and unknown to him, Pierre welcomed it for the same reason.

By eight o'clock every one was aboard the launch. The servants lined up in a row to wave good-by. Their eyes were misty with tears.

"That's not for us, you know," Brom murmured to Anne as the launch chugged away from the landing.

"I hardly supposed it was," she answered. "I feel a bit like crying myself."

"Over him?" Brom whispered tantalizingly, nodding toward Pierre.

Anne threw up her head and stopped Brom with a flash of her eyes. "Is there any one else in this launch worth crying over?" she demanded with telling effect.

Brom did not answer at once. He nodded his head mysteriously. "One other, I fancy," he said finally, and Anne did not ask to be enlightened.

## PART THREE

### CHAPTER XXVIII

#### EASY MONEY

THE Malverns had been back at The Towers for a month when Jim began to question the success of his scheme to throw Gloria into Pierre's arms. He had met Anne clandestinely several times. Her pessimism had stung him. On their last ride together she had insisted on returning to Paris. Malvern had been sorely put to dissuade her. He told himself that if his plans had not matured it was his own fault; he had been too cautious. He had feared that Gloria would break with him, and to avert such a calamity he had been careful of his conduct, giving her no reason to suspect him. His rôle of dutiful husband had defeated his own ends. He could see that now.

As a result of this reasoning he gave up any

thought of restraint, besieging Anne with attentions. Anne, however, frowned on this, although she did go to Malvern Farm with him once or twice. Balked by her, he found other excuses for absenting himself from Gloria's presence. Often two or three days at a time passed without their seeing anything of one another. The loans he had needed had been negotiated. Financially, Malvern felt that he could weather any storm. He even began to hope that Gloria would divorce him; he knew that society was whispering such a thing already. His way was preferable, but if it failed, and it seemed now that it would, for nothing went on at The Towers but was reported to him, then Gloria must divorce him.

He understood Ducharme; but Gloria had become a mystery to him. The Frenchman was plainly "fed up," bored, as out of key with his surroundings as a man could be. Society had fawned on him, but Ducharme had read the gesture for what it was worth.

Malvern understood this; but he had no way of knowing that Pierre's nearness to Gloria had become a torture to the man. Gloria did not suspect it either. How could she know that every little kindness she showed him but brought home more poignantly the realization of what he had been denied in the scheme of things? He felt that he must go north again, or die. And yet he could not tear himself away. He had come to hate his position as Malvern's guest, even as he had come to despise Malvern. (He had caught a thinly veiled allusion to himself and Gloria in the columns of a certain weekly magazine.)

He could not understand Gloria's patience with Malvern. It was uncomplaining, stoical! He knew she was frightfully unhappy. Why she chose to go on was as much a mystery to him as it was to Malvern. In fact, in many ways he understood her even less than Jim did. Without having said so, he sensed that she felt

the servants were spying on her. He had that feeling, too.

Some men would have taken it as a warning, but Malvern was so far from having any thought of letting Gloria see what was in his heart that his conduct was affected not at all. It was a capital error on his part. If he had been aware of Wheeler Johnson's existence and had realized the man's peculiar talents, he would not have been rash enough to believe that he was quite through with Renée Grant. He had ended the opulence which had been Wheeler's for many years, and the injustice which had smoldered in Wheeler's mean little soul had broken into flame after a bad week at Latonia and a more disastrous one at Fort Erie. Renée was dancing again, so Wheeler's appeal had been promptly answered. He had returned to New York determined to make Malvern "come through." The zeal with which he always read the society news in the different New York papers would have flattered its mem-

bers. It was an old habit of Wheeler's. But of course he was, or, rather, had been, strictly dependent on society. It followed that he knew the Malverns had returned to The Towers. He had even noted the reference to Ducharme. At the time he had thought little enough of it; but he was no sooner back in town than he set about satisfying his curiosity as to the exact state of affairs in the Malvern household. Fortune favored him, for among the Malvern servants he found an old acquaintance in the person of Tim Eagan, now a hostler in the big Westchester estate. Tim's wife was a parlor maid. An evening in the Eagan cottage and Wheeler had trouble in containing himself. Long after the lights of Broadway had winked out, he let himself into Renée's suite in the Standish Hotel, situated in one of the once roaring Forties—quite a step, by the way from the luxury of the "bird-cage" of happy memory.

Renée had just come in. She had slipped into a very revealing negligée. Wheeler found

her curled up on a comfortable divan, deep in the columns of the morning papers. He tossed his hat aside carelessly as she looked up.

“Where have you been?” she inquired.

“I’ve been spending a very quiet evening in the country,” Wheeler answered deeply.

“What part of the country?” Renée’s tone made him smile.

“The most fashionable part,” said he. “Rye, to be exact.”

“Wheeler!”

Renée crumpled her papers as she pushed them out of her way angrily.

“Oh, you needn’t get excited,” he cautioned her. “I’m going to hand you the biggest laugh of your life.”

Renée was not interested in his promise.

“You know that I warned you to keep away from Malvern. I’m not going to shake him down. When I change my mind, I’ll let you know. He came through like a prince for years. If I didn’t save a stake for myself, that’s my

fault. I've got some pride, Wheeler; I'm not going to squeeze him."

"Well, I'm telling you there wouldn't be a chance of your doing it. You can quit worrying about that. I met an old friend of mine at The Towers—Tim Eagan. He's looking after Malvern's horses. His wife's in the house, a maid or something like that. I got an earful. The Malverns will be going through the divorce mill in another month. If she don't start the ball rolling, he will."

"Is that the big laugh?" Renée asked, unwilling to have Wheeler see how interested she was in what he was telling her.

"Laugh? Say!—wait! You've heard about this guide Malvern brought down with him from Canada?—Ducharme is his name, a big Frenchman. Well, it's a plant—just a plant. On the square of it I don't see how Malvern got away downtown. You always thought he was clever. Humph! I saw through his game in bringing this guy Ducharme down to New

York before Tim had finished telling me about him. This Frenchman is a handsome gent; he's knocked the society dames for a row of gools. Something happened up in Canada to make Malvern think his wife was sweet on Ducharme. You know the drag the north woods gag has for some women. Your clever Jim brought him along to keep his wife company. Tim and the rest of the servants got the office to keep their eyes open. I guess you can figure out what was in Malvern's mind. But it's been a bust. This Ducharme is not a fool. It looks to me as if he was wise to the lay. Or maybe Malvern's wife got a flash of what was on and gummed the works."

Renée found fault with Wheeler's logic.

"You wouldn't admit that any one could be on the square, would you, Wheeler?—especially a woman."

"Sure I will when you can prove it to me. Though I ain't throwing any dirt at Mrs. Malvern. From what I hear, I guess she's the

goods. But I don't *get* her. Malvern's treated her like a dog. Maybe she's sticking on account of the money. Take it from me that she knows he's been stepping out with another dame."

"Who?"

Renée fairly whipped out the single word. The next instant she realized utter indifference should have been her rôle. To cover up, she added:

"Some show-girl, I suppose."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### A CONFIDENTIAL MISSION

WHEELER glanced at Renée with a grin on his face. Her exclamation had betrayed her, and therefore, he let her wait for her answer.

“So you are interested, eh?” he said tauntingly, and paused to light a cigarette with provoking deliberation. “You seem surprised to hear that a woman is at the bottom of this. What would Malvern want a divorce for if there wasn’t another woman——”

“Who is it? Who is the woman?” Renée interrupted impatiently.

Wheeler shook his head. “That’s something of a secret,” he drawled. “I didn’t know myself when I left Rye to-night; but I got the answer now. Tim had it from Malvern’s private chauffeur that the big boss had ’phoned him to bring a car to White Plains three or

four times lately. Malvern would drive away by himself. Maybe it'd be two in the morning before he come back to pick up his man. I didn't say nothing to Tim, but if I ain't solved that puzzle, I'm a fool. I don't know anybody who'd fit into this; but Scarsdale ain't so far from White Plains. There's a big society gun down there—a yellow glow-worm—the very sort of a dame Malvern would be apt to fall for—been to Mrs. Malvern's parties right along—been north with 'em, too. There ain't a chance that I'm wrong. . . . Do you follow me?"

Renée nodded tragically. She got up, her face white.

"Anne Cabot!" She almost whispered the name.

"Anne Cabot—the Governor's sister!" Wheeler exclaimed triumphantly. "I guess that hands you a laugh, don't it?"

The news staggered Renée. She told herself that it was only a surmise—a blind groping in the dark on Wheeler's part. And yet

she could not deny it; something told her that she had heard the truth. She even wondered why it should matter so to her. Malvern was out of her life; Anne Cabot was only a name. Why should Wheeler's chatter alarm her?

The room had suddenly become stifling. She went to the window and stood there gazing down on the deserted street. Wheeler caught her excitement.

"I thought it would hand you a jolt," said he.

A night-hawk taxi came tearing down the street. Renée watched it, thinking how much it resembled a human down-and-outer with its one bright headlight shining wisely beside its pale, twitching brother.

"You'd better forget this, Wheeler," she muttered. "You are just guessing. It couldn't mean anything to you."

"No? Well, I'm not so sure about that. As for me guessing—I aim to make certain before this week's over."

"I tell you to forget it!" Renée exclaimed

angrily as she turned to face him. "What is it you are thinking of, anyhow?"

"Oh—nothing."

"It's as bad as that, eh?"

"It's nothing to you," Wheeler flared back. "You're not going to be mixed up in anything. Why, Malvern wouldn't want anything better than to have you squeal. He'd get his divorce, wouldn't he? I'm not crazy. I'm not fool enough to waste my time trying to jack him down on your account. That's out!"

"But you're going after him in another way. I can read you, Wheeler. I tell you, I won't have it!"

"I'm doing it for you!" he said stubbornly. "He can't chuck you and get away with it."

"Doing it for me, eh?" Renée repeated with a sarcastic tilting of her mouth. Her eyes snapped as she regarded him. "Now you are funny," she said. "Maybe we'd better be frank with each other, Wheeler. You know we are near the break." Wheeler protested, but she

did not heed him. "If you don't know it," she went on, "you are blind. I've stood about all I intend to from you. If you go through with what you've got on your mind, we're done. You get that straight, Wheeler!"

"Now what do you want to go on like that for?" Wheeler entreated; he had sense enough to recognize the danger signals. "I ain't never crossed you, have I? I tell you I wouldn't ever have give it a second thought but for you. It burns me up to think of that big stiff getting away with what he did on you—throwing you down cold. But if you say so, it's off."

But, of course, it was not. Wheeler regarded this opportunity as the "softest" thing in his life; he could no more forego it than fly. If Malvern proved obdurate, he would threaten—Anne. Where would John Cabot be if this thing got into print?

"Why, it's a sure thing," he told himself. "Somebody's got to come through. And it's going to be for real dough, too."

He wisely said nothing further to Renée. Three days later she gladly gave him a "stake" to take him to Bowie. But his destination lay in another direction. By the end of the week he knew that he had not been mistaken about Anne.

His sources of information were strange—or so certain prominent society people would have found them—taxi-drivers, show-girls—discharged servants and a bootlegger.

Such information as he was after came easily to Wheeler, and he took a pardonable pride in his success, his only regret being that he could not parade himself and his information before Renée.

## CHAPTER XXX

### AN INTERRUPTED LUNCHEON

THE world is excessively fond of scandal and gossip, or else such a paper as *Exit*—with the accent on the last syllable—could not have prospered. Gloria's mother pretended that she found it very offensive, but coming upon a copy in a friend's dressing-room—obviously placed there for her eyes—she had not hesitated to turn its pages. A two column picture of Renée rewarded her. Renée was in a fair way of regaining her old prestige on Broadway. The picture, without the accompanying blurb, would have meant nothing to Mrs. Dawn. The blurb, however, won her complete attention. It said:

“Radiant Renée continues to score a triumph at the Golden Canary. James Malvern, the railroad magnate, entertained a party of friends at the ring-

side last evening. We wonder what Renée was thinking about as she sang the chorus of *I've Kissed You, Daddy*. Stranger things have happened."

It took Mrs. Dawn less than an hour to rush to Gloria's side. Gloria took it coldly. Her mother was insistent, however. She came away from The Towers in a wrathful mood, determined that Gloria should leave Malvern at once.

Gloria was almost glad that her mother knew at last. Even if she had tried to make the breach between Jim and herself less wide than it was, her mother had learned enough to demand more. Gloria understood her well enough to know that she would have the whole truth sooner or later. It would be dragged out of her bit by bit. Well, perhaps that was best. Gloria felt that it but hastened the end.

Malvern had taken his friends to the Golden Canary well aware that Renée was dancing there. He had half hoped that something would be made of it. Renée had been surprised to see

him. The blurb in *Exit* amused her. She understood that the final curtain had fallen on their affair. Still, it was good publicity! In many ways, she had ceased to regret losing Malvern. She felt that he might have stayed away from the Golden Canary; it would have been the decent thing to do.

To make matters worse, she had to run into him on Monday as she got out of her taxi at the Waldorf. It was a grim twist of fate that brought them together, for Malvern rarely lunched uptown. In the old days Waldorf had been beyond the pale for Renée—a place Malvern had denied her either in his company or alone. Perhaps that was why she consented to lunch there with him this day; perhaps that was why Malvern asked her. He knew just how reckless the adventure was, but he was in the mood for it, even thrilled, in a way, although Renée and he found little to talk about. Which was quite natural under the circumstances.

Suddenly he felt, rather than saw, Renée stiffen. Gustav, the head-waiter, was coming toward them, importance fairly beaming on his rotund face. Behind him came Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer and Gloria. Mrs. Van's eyelids raised for a fleeting second as she saw Malvern.

"That little table over by the window, Gustav," Malvern heard her say. He might not have been there as she passed, for any further sign from her.

Gloria recognized Renée for the lady of the picture. Something of Ducharme's stoicism came to her in this moment, and she gave her husband a nod and a smile as she passed him. It crushed Malvern. Whole minutes passed before he spoke to Renée.

"If you've finished, we will go," said he.

"Why so shaky, Jim?" Renée asked lightly. "I thought you had better stuff in you than that. You've accomplished the very thing you had in mind."

"And that was that?" he demanded rather crossly.

"The big break."

"What gave you that idea?"

"Oh—nothing," Renée said evasively, realizing that she had said too much.

Jim wondered just why the truth from Renée should embarrass him. It was a second or two before he answered.

"Well, it's the truth," Malvern declared as he recovered some of his poise. "It can't come too quickly."

"It won't be exactly pleasant for me, will it?" Renée demanded very pointedly.

"Perhaps not; but see me through. You'll have nothing to regret," he assured her.

They left then.

"The rotter!" Mrs. Van muttered. It was her only comment. Gloria did not reply. She might well have confided in Mrs. Van, but pride locked her lips. She had come to town to shop, but as soon as Mrs. Van left, Gloria ordered

her chauffeur to drive her home. Ducharme had gone to Malvern Farm to see Jim's bird dogs. She was glad he was not there to read her excitement. During the afternoon her mother telephoned, but Gloria did not speak to her. Tears had brought no relief. She felt that she had to confide in some one, or die; and yet she could not bring herself to unburden her soul to her mother. She thought of Abe Ascher; Abe would understand. But how could she admit to him that she had made this terrible mistake?

Her ideas of divorce were vague. She knew she would have to see an attorney. He would know how one got a divorce. Her helplessness smote her; other women knew about such things.

A maid brought up the evening papers. Gloria made her take them away; newspapers loomed in her eyes as things of horror. In fancy, she saw her name scrawled across the front pages—all of the intimate details of her

life spread out for the entertainemnt of New York's millions. The thought sickened her. She tried to sleep, but she was far too nervous for that. There was a hint of fall in the evening air, a golden harvest moon hung low over the cedars. She dressed, and throwing a light wrap around her shoulders, came downstairs and went out upon the wide terrace which circled the big house.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### REVELATION

DUCHARME returned shortly after ten o'clock. He came out on the terrace a few minutes later. Seeing him brought her a sense of relief. Unconsciously, she had been waiting for him. She realized as much now. It startled her. Her lips trembled as she smiled at Pierre. He sat down beside her. She thought he seemed unusually reserved, even solemn.

"Your face is drawn, Pierre," she said anxiously. "You're not ill?"

"No, madame," he answered wearily. "Just tired."

"What, Ducharme tired?" Gloria queried teasingly. Pierre smiled.

"You see, madame, even the impossible happens."

“And the dogs—were they up to what you had heard about them?”

“Good show-dogs; but they need work. At that, they are no better than my own. A Gordon setter, a big black fellow, caught my fancy. But it’s a strange breed; you can’t tell about a Gordon, until you have shot over him. I found Gregory interesting. He knows nothing about dogs, though.”

Pierre did not say that he found the farmer-caretaker of the place interesting chiefly because the man had volunteered the information that Mr. and Mrs. Malvern had been up to the farm three nights before. They had arrived after dusk and stayed but a short while. Gregory had not spoken to Mrs. Malvern; but he had noticed her in the car as her husband waved to him from the private road.

Ducharme had not suggested that he might be mistaken; but he knew for a fact that Gloria had not been within twenty-five miles of Malvern Farm in four weeks. There was only one

conclusion left him. It was no more than he had suspected. His surprise was that Malvern had been bold enough to bring another woman to a place that he might reasonably expect Gloria to visit sooner or later. He could not have known but what his companion would have to face the Gregorys. He had not cared, evidently. It made his conduct particularly disgusting to Ducharme. He wanted to advise Gloria, but, obviously, he could not. Unless she made the request, he could say nothing. It was a silly code—he felt that—but it passed for a law of honor among men. It was no longer possible for him to stay at The Towers. He would have to move to town in the morning. Beyond that he had no plans.

The tired, hurt look in Gloria's eyes stabbed at his heart. If he only had the right to fight this thing for her! If she could lean on him! What good was his often-tested strength?—the years of clean living? In the hour of his

greatest need he found himself powerless, impotent!

“You had a pleasant day in town?” he asked. The words grated on his ears, his question but proving anew how impersonal his position was in regard to Gloria. He was surprised to see her shake her head.

“A very disastrous one,” said she.

“Socially?”

“No—mentally.”

Her lips twitched tremulously over the admission. Ducharme glanced at her sharply. Her face seemed more wistful than ever in the half-light.

“Some one offended you!” he exclaimed, his voice betraying him for once. It was not a question; he could read Gloria’s eyes too well for that. Something snapped in Ducharme. He put his hand on hers; caught it in his grasp. Had Malvern shamed her publicly?

“Who was it?” he murmured huskily. “Tell

me——” His voice broke; he had almost called her Gloria.

His personality laid violent hands on Gloria. She seemed caught up—drawn out of herself. Reserve slipped away from her. Barriers that she had never thought to scale were left far behind. A will stronger than her own seemed to motivate her. She realized that she was telling Ducharme what had happened. Her voice sounded strange to her ears. As she went on, she gradually won control of herself; her taut nerves relaxed, a weight seemed to have been lifted from her. Her spirit was leaning on Ducharme. She realized as much in a vague, subconscious way. It did not frighten her or make her pause to ask why it should be so. As she spoke, her mind kept leaping ahead to vantage points from which she could look back on the past weeks. She saw what a tangled, impossible existence hers had been. By comparison she felt almost normal as she went on. She told him of incidents that had happened at

Bois Blanc; of the days before Malvern and she had gone north. Something in Ducharme's eyes made her stop suddenly.

"Why, Pierre!" she gasped. "You know—you are not surprised."

"No, I knew at Bois Blanc," he murmured.

"I—I presume you did," she went on slowly. "The others must have known, too. It was foolish of me, but I hoped and hoped that Jim and I could avoid what we've come to." She looked away without speaking for ever so long. "It is not easy to admit that one has made such a terrible failure of everything," she said at last. "Ideals shattered—dreams all gone to smash."

Ducharme got up and gazed down at the pool below them. Gloria did not hear the groan that escaped his lips. Her eyes followed him, however. She arose and walked to where he stood.

"Pierre," she said softly, "tell me, has it been all my fault? Where did I fail?"

Ducharme whirled on her.

“Fail?” he echoed. “You have not failed! To me you are as a white rose—as spotless, as unspoiled, as I have seen them in the early morning before the sun burns away the dew. My countrymen are plain people, and yet they have come to be critical of outsiders; but you won them. Here in New York, many people have come into your life; they have been better for knowing you—all save Malvern. But surely it has not remained for me to tell you so. As for failing—you have not failed, Madame. One fails only when he is untrue to the best that is in him.”

A tear stole down Gloria’s cheek as she gazed away at the mist creeping over the closely-cropped lawn. “You are very kind, Pierre,” she said. It was hardly more than a whisper. “But I’m afraid you flatter me; you have always been very considerate. I have shuddered at the thought of divorce. Still, the world can hardly expect me to go on.”

She did not raise her eyes. Ducharme nodded, his jaws locked. "I would not worry about what the world will say," said he. "There are some things one must decide for himself. This is one of them. But I feel that I must not advise you. And yet I would do you any service that I could. Perhaps you will find me hard to understand. I assure you that it is not because of Malvern that I hesitate. He has forfeited the right to any consideration from me, even though I am here as his guest. Anyhow, I am leaving in the morning."

This came as a fresh calamity to Gloria.

"You are not going back to Canada, Pierre?" she asked unevenly.

He trembled as he caught her concern. He said jerkily:

"For the present I am going to remain in New York. If you should need me, I—it would be an honor to serve you." The desire to take her into his arms almost overwhelmed him; he knew he dared not stay on the terrace with her.

He glanced at his watch nervously. It was after midnight. Gloria nodded.

"It is late," she murmured. "I do not suppose that I will see you before the time you leave."

"Perhaps not. I will let your mother know where I am staying," he added as they walked toward the house.

A servant switched on the lights as they reached the steps. A moment later a car drew up and Malvern stepped out. He had been drinking. He stared sullenly at Gloria.

The picture he made in his present condition sickened her. Determination that she little suspected she possessed flared in her.

"Jim," she whispered hoarsely, "both of us cannot stay in this house to-night. Either you go, or I shall."

Pritchett, the butler, backed away.

"Remain where you are, Pritchett," Gloria ordered. "I am certain you will hear nothing that will shock or surprise you."

Pritchett bowed humbly, but without his usual aplomb, for Gloria's shot had pierced his armor.

"And you, Ducharme, you can stay too," Malvern exclaimed insolently. "Apparently we have no secrets from you." Gloria caught Pierre's arm as he took a step toward Malvern. Malvern laughed drunkenly.

"I will not disturb you," he said to Gloria. "I'll go—I'll go—gladly! Gladly, do you understand? But why throw stones at me?" The words seemed to please him and he repeated them, more to himself than to Gloria. "So you're goin' to divorce me, eh?" he mumbled thickly. 'S all right! Sauce for the goose and vinegar for the gander—but fair enough! But don't look so abused—you've had Ducharme."

Malvern could not have foreseen the effect his words would produce, or else he would not have uttered them, for, in the final analysis, he was not a brave man. The stillness that followed touched even him. Gloria and

Ducharme seemed to have been stricken dumb. Like a flash, then, Ducharme had him by the neck. Up and up he lifted him, until he held him so that their faces were on a level.

Gloria groaned as she saw Malvern's face turn purple; his tongue ran out over his lips. Ducharme snapped his arms. She heard Malvern's teeth click as his head shot back and forth. It seemed that the life would be shaken out of him.

"You will kill him!" she cried, white of face.

Ducharme gave no sign that he heard. A moment later, however, he relaxed his hold and Malvern crumpled to the floor. Pierre stood over him menacingly. One of his hands reached down and dragged the man to his feet. He shook him roughly.

"Stand up!" he ordered. "You lied, and you know it! Beg Mrs. Malvern's pardon for that remark."

More sober than he had been Malvern mut-

tered an apology. He tried to include Pierre, but Ducharme stopped him.

"I'll accept no apology from you," he exclaimed. "But I warn you, Malvern—don't ever connect my name with your wife's again. I'll kill you as sure as you do."

Ducharme's eyes flashed. With tigerish swiftness his arm straightened. As though shot from a gun, Malvern hurtled backwards.

"Put him in his car!" he said to Pritchett. With cheeks burning, and without a word to Gloria, he turned and went to his room.

Half an hour later Gloria heard him leave the house. She saw him as he crossed the terrace—so tall and erect! Malvern's words came back to burn themselves into her consciousness.

"You've had Ducharme!"

She repeated them aloud. The blindness which had been hers was gone. Knees shaking, she staggered back to bed.

"I have Ducharme," she whispered as the tears wet her hot cheeks. It was a revelation.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### GUILTY

CONTRARY to his promise, Ducharme did not let Mrs. Dawn hear from him. For a day or two he glanced rather fearfully at the newspapers, but they were strangely silent concerning the Malverns. He felt that it was but a respite from the inevitable scandal to come. He fully realized Malvern's purpose in inviting him to The Towers. A savage desire to crush him gripped Ducharme. He knew better than to believe that Malvern would hesitate to blacken him to serve his own ends. And what a damning ring of evidence he had welded about himself! The truth, contorted as Malvern would contort it, would serve him better than any fiction he could invent.

Pierre could foresee the lurid tale—the trifling wife—the unscrupulous “guide!” It

gave him the feeling of having betrayed Gloria. At times he was sorry that he had not killed Malvern. Instinctively he searched for a weapon that would not leave him entirely at the man's mercy. To this end he began trailing Renée Grant. But nothing came of it, for he failed to catch a glimpse of Malvern.

Smarting under a fresh disappointment, he decided to go to Malvern Farm, hoping that Gregory might make some admission that would be of use to him. But for all of his adroitness, Pierre could not get any further information from him than that Malvern had not been to the farm since he, Ducharme, had last been there. He accepted Mrs. Gregory's invitation to supper; in fact, it was nearly nine o'clock before he set out to walk to the station. He had covered more than half the distance to the main road when he caught the flash of automobile headlights bearing towards him. He had barely concealed himself when the car flashed past him. In the brief second he caught the

sound of a woman's voice. From where he stood he could see that the car did not stop at Gregory's house but went to the farmhouse proper, a distance further on.

Ducharme had not recognized the driver of the car, but he had no reason to doubt that it was Malvern. Several minutes passed as he stood in the middle of the lane, staring at the old farmhouse. Light beamed from the windows then. Ducharme broke into an easy lope. He turned from the lane and detoured through the apple orchard as he passed the Gregory place. A few seconds found him back on the narrow road, the house less than a hundred yards away. He saw a door open. The man who entered left it ajar behind him. A moment later a shot rang out. Ducharme stopped running. The next instant a second shot shattered the stillness—a woman stifled a scream—a window was thrown up. . . . Gregory's dog barked. . . . Silence! And inside the farmhouse a man lay dead.

Malvern had met Anne that evening at a country club between Scarsdale and White Plains. He had not known that his car carried a third passenger as he sent it bounding away. Wheeler Johnson had succeeded in learning Malvern's secret, where Ducharme had failed. Of course, he had possessed information which Pierre did not have. In Wheeler's words—it was better to watch the sugar than the flies. For ten days he had shadowed Anne, confident that Malvern would have a rendezvous with her sooner or later.

He was prepared to go to any length to make Malvern pay for his silence. On the way north from the club he had heard enough to make him realize that he had waited almost too long. Wheeler almost lost his grip on the top of the sedan as he heard Malvern say that he and Gloria had separated. The "show-down" must come to-night! He took courage as he learned their destination. It could not have been ordered more to his liking. Malvern was still a

married man—night—a lonely farmhouse! How could this Cabot dame laugh him down? Such a chance might never come again.

He had no plans to make; none were necessary. This affair to-night called for direct action. Impatiently he waited for Malvern and Anne to enter. He strained his ears to catch the sound of a key turning in the lock. A smile crossed his face as he realized that the door remained unlocked. Noiselessly he slipped to the ground. Gun in hand, he came around from the rear of the car. Malvern had left the headlights burning. Thoughtlessly, Wheeler passed in front of them. It was the great mistake of his life, for it threw his shadow on the window. It caught Anne's eye. Although unable to speak, her fingers sank into Malvern's arm, and he saw!

Unaware that his coming had been announced, Wheeler threw open the door. Malvern had drawn his gun, and, as the man who had lived on him so long stepped into the room

with leveled pistol, Malvern fired. He winced at his own shot, for he had not meant to press the trigger. Wonderingly he glanced at the gun in his hand, as if asking why it had played this trick on him.

Wheeler groaned as the bullet ploughed up the floor. He was untouched, but sick with fear. If he was true to any law, it was to the one of self-preservation. He might never have thought of blackmailing Malvern, so completely had the idea been banished from his mind. All that he could see was the wavering gun pointing at him. In a flash he was back at the bottom of the abysmal pit from which the human race has climbed. His little rat eyes glittered bestially. Slowly, with deliberate aim, he raised his gun and fired. Malvern tottered from side to side, his head sagging forward. Anne put her hand to her mouth to force back a scream as he pitched to the floor—dead—a bullet in his heart!

A minute—years long—passed as Anne and

Wheeler surveyed each other. The Cabot blood, which Anne had so often scoffed at, began to tell. Fear gradually slipped away from her. Wheeler's spirit had long since disintegrated. He glanced up from the bloody thing upon the floor and found that he could not take his eyes away from hers. Paralysis of a sort gripped him. His jaw fell; his gun slipped from his fingers. He wanted to scream. His cry started, only to die out in his throat in a horrible, gurgling moan. He knew that he must get away. He tried to move, but his feet seemed fastened to the floor. He heard some one coming—It broke the spell that held him. He shook his head to clear it. A window which Malvern had half opened beckoned to him. With a wild leap he was across the room. He pushed the sash up, and with the agility of an ape leaped out into the night.

Flight! It registered in Anne's brain too. She caught the pad pad of running feet. The window was low. There was time yet! Catch-

ing her skirt up, she jumped. The ground was soft; she spread her arms to keep her balance. Breathless, she fled away. Circling the house, she fought her way back to the lane. The underbrush cut through her stockings and ripped her legs. Gregory came running then. She slunk in back of a tree and waited for him to pass. She ran on shortly. In half an hour she was on the highway. She judged that it was three miles to the railroad. She straightened her clothes and set off. Trees lined the road. Whenever a car approached, she left the highway. It was a few minutes after ten when she reached Pawling. The last New York express was due in a few minutes. She paced the platform until it arrived. White Plains was an express stop; she got off there. She waited in the station until a train from New York filled the depot with returning theater-goers. She got into a taxi then. By midnight she was safe in her room at Cabot Manor.

Ducharme reached the farmhouse but a mo-

ment after Anne had leaped through the open window. He had not paused to ask himself what had happened. His eyes bulged as he saw Malvern's dead body, the lifeless fingers still clutching the gun with which he had shot at Wheeler.

The acrid smell of burnt gunpowder filled the room. Ducharme's eyes took in the open window—the other gun. He bent and picked it up. It was still warm. Dazed, he knelt beside the body and tried to catch some sign of lingering life. He shook his head as he drew his hand back.

"Dead!" he muttered, his voice hanging on in the stillness.

"Throw up your hands!" came a sharp command from the door, and Gregory stalked into the room, his shotgun leveled at Ducharme.

Pierre blinked his eyes as if not understanding.

"Throw up your hands!" Gregory cried once more.

Comprehension came to Ducharme. "My God!" he roared, "you don't think *I* did this?"

"I don't know as I'm saying," the farmer answered. "But it looks pretty bad for you, mister. Drop that gun!"

Speechless, Ducharme let the revolver fall. With the toe of his shoe he slid it across the floor to Gregory's feet.

Mrs. Gregory came soon after. Husband and wife bound Ducharme. Another hour brought the State Police. For once the law moved quickly . . . Pritchett's evidence—Ducharme's threat to kill Malvern—Gregory's tale of the question concerning Malvern's visits to the farm—Ducharme kneeling, gun in hand, over the dead man's body! What evidence was there wanting? The prosecuting attorney smiled; it was almost too easy.

Two months later the newspapers which had fairly reeked with nauseating details of the Malvern case—of Renée Grant and the "bird-cage"—of Gloria's mad love for her "Indian"

guide, flamed again with the screaming headline: "Mrs. Malvern's North Wood's Lover Found Guilty! Ducharme Must Pay the Penalty."

And Gloria, crushed—crucified—deserted by all save her mother, Mrs. Van, and little Abe Ascher, prayed that she might die.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

NEW YORK forgets quickly. Gloria had proof of it in the following weeks. The domestic affairs of a prominent banker began to engage the attention of the public prints, and before the month was over the Malvern case had been forgotten. In a way it made Ducharme's fate seem even more cruel.

She had been to see him repeatedly. Always she came away feeling that justice would have been served the better could they have exchanged places. She had brought this thing upon him. But for her, Ducharme would be roaming his beloved North.

Mrs. Van and Gloria's mother very unwisely tried to fill her mind with thoughts of other matters—to make her see that no fault was hers. It not only failed of success, but made

Gloria more determined than ever to continue her fight for Ducharme's life. Her faith in his innocence had never wavered.

Brom Jones, just arrived from abroad, came to see her.

"Of course Ducharme didn't do this thing!" he exclaimed vehemently. "I saw enough of him up north to wager my life that he is innocent. We've got to do something. What about John Cabot? Have you seen him? He's over at Cabot Manor. Laddie's dangerously sick—influenza, or something. John will have to help us."

The Governor had written Gloria on the occasion of Malvern's funeral. It was a fine, friendly letter. But how could he help her? She was so firmly convinced that Pierre would be freed that she had no thought of asking for a pardon for him. She said as much to Brom.

"I know, Gloria," he answered, "but time's the most important thing in the world to us right now. If we can get time enough—a stay

of three months, or so—we can sift the evidence over and over. I'll speak to John if you care to have me."

"Not yet, Brom," Gloria murmured. "I dread asking him."

"I can't understand why."

"Well, you know Jim had a great deal to do with electing him."

"No reason at all!" Brom declared. "Don't feel like that. Where's Anne?"

"California. Mrs. Van tells me she left on a moment's notice."

Brom's lips curled contemptuously. "Running away when she might have stayed to buck you up, eh? I can't understand some people. Friends? Humph! But, no matter. I believe we can count on John if the time grows short. Hasn't anything turned up since the trial?"

"Nothing of any moment. Gregory brought me a shoe buckle the other day. He had been burning off the underbrush when he chanced to see it."

"A man's shoe?"

"No—no. The kind of buckle women wear on dress pumps—you know the kind I mean. I didn't think anything of it. It might have lain there for years."

In response to Brom's request, she showed him the buckle.

"It's smart, isn't it?" he exclaimed. "Must have cost a penny or two. It's not the sort of thing you'd expect to find a country girl wearing. It looks like the Avenue or the Rue de la Paix to me. Do the police know about it?"

"Oh, the police!" Gloria murmured. "Please, Brom!"

"Well, don't say anything then. I think it's a very, very important bit of evidence. As for its having been there for years—why, I swear I've seen women wearing that very type of buckle in Paris within the last month. As a matter of fact, aren't New Yorkers wearing them this fall?"

"Some, perhaps. I didn't notice, Brom. It

does fit in with Pierre's story—he has always claimed that Jim had a woman in his car that night."

She looked at Brom for confirmation.

"True!" he declared. "Get the old courage back, Gloria. Something like this will solve the mystery. By the way, were you satisfied with the alibi Renée Grant offered at the trial? The Paris edition of the *Times* printed only a part of the testimony."

"Absolutely, Brom," Gloria answered, wondering why he asked. "She was dancing in New York at the time of the shooting. The owner of the café and any number of patrons swore to it. Do you suspect her?"

"Not after what you just told me. But I had another reason for asking. Renée Grant owes almost everything she has to Jim. It is not reasonable to suppose that another woman could have come into his life without her endeavoring to find out everything she could about her. Do you follow me, Gloria?"

“Why—why, yes. You mean that if there was a woman in the case—and it was not Renée Grant—she, at least, knows who that woman is.”

“Exactly! Kiraldy should not have overlooked that. He is a clever and excellent attorney, but I do not believe that he helped Ducharme’s case any by bullying this Miss Grant. Between Kiraldy and the press she was under fire from the first day to the last. And more for what she had been to Jim rather than for an actual participation in the event which led to his death. Naturally, she refused to talk. Properly handled, she might have proven a good witness. Why don’t you have a talk with her?”

“I have been intending to see her—not with any thought of seeking information. I feel that some arrangement should be made for her out of the money Jim left. I want none of it.” Brom started to protest. “No,” Gloria insisted, “I couldn’t touch it, Brom. I have made some

tentative plans for disposing of it. They include Miss Grant."

"That's—very generous of you," Brom admitted grudgingly. "Not that I approve of it. I think it's quixotic. However, I would make it a point to see Miss Grant."

Gloria promised to do so. Brom had proven a godsend. Gloria's face seemed less white as she walked to the door with him.

"How does Pierre take it?" he asked as he was leaving.

"He's very brave. But you can imagine what prison must mean to him. His eyes haunt me."

"I shall go to see him this Thursday. And remember, Gloria, everything is not hopeless." He wrung her hand heartily. "See you tomorrow for a minute," he called back as he ran down the steps.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### GLORIA MEETS RENÉE

DURING the trial and the days following it, Renée took what comfort she could from the fact that Wheeler had stepped out of her life. He had written her from Baltimore the day following Ducharme's arrest. It was the first word from him in several weeks. He wrote that he had made a big "stake"; that he was leaving for Mexico—Juarez and then the Tia Juana meeting. She did not answer his letter. He had not written again. A day or two after receiving word from him she had been caught in a vortex of publicity whose widening circle must have reached him however far away he might be. She took her own answer from his continued silence, read into it the unforgivable offence, saw him for the miserable coward he was. Her word for it was "yellow." A retro-

spection convinced her that he had always been that—"yellow." She began to take a savage joy in the knowledge that he was out of her life forever.

Kiraldy, Ducharme's attorney, had begun his methodical torturing, painting her as a wanton—a lecherous beast who had snared Malvern with her wiles. When he had finished she was undressed, naked in the eyes of the world. Public opinion had turned against her. She could feel it from day to day. Publicity had always been the genii who carried the key to success; but such publicity as became hers was more than even the Golden Canary could abide.

She had not worked since that time. Bitter, hating the world in general, and the press and Kiraldy in particular, she shut herself in her hotel and refused to be seen or interviewed. Gloria's note, asking to see her, promptly found its way into the fire even though its tone was kindly.

"She can't come here to pity me," she mut-

tered aloud. "I'll not be the object of another moral lesson."

Her better judgment prevailed finally. Surely Mrs. Malvern had suffered even more than she. That evening she sent word that she would see Gloria the following afternoon.

Renée found it hard to compose herself as the time for Mrs. Malvern's visit arrived, and yet, as Gloria entered her suite, Renée was the more at ease of the two. She saw very quickly that Mrs. Malvern had not come to preach. In fact, Gloria won her in the first few minutes. Neither in word nor tone was there anything in what Mrs. Malvern said to suggest the patronizing which Renée had expected, but she was amazed at what she suggested.

"Why—I had no thought of such a thing! I'm not the cold-blooded, money-grabbing person the world believes I am."

"I don't believe you are, either," said Gloria. "I know just how hard it has been for you these past weeks. I have suffered, too; life is still a

nightmare to me. I have been misrepresented, misquoted, reviled, glorified; it has been a terrible experience. I am quite willing to believe that you fared no better. Do not misunderstand me about the money; I feel that it is due you, not a gift from me. It will be a month or two before the estate can be touched. In the meantime, I will gladly assist you if you are short of funds."

Renée was left speechless.

"I—you—you overwhelm me," she murmured at last. "I hardly know how to express what I feel, Mrs. Malvern. Naturally, I expected to find you very bitter toward me."

"No," Gloria murmured musingly, "I conquered that feeling long ago. It was my husband who was unfair to me, not you."

Renée realized just how wide the gulf was that separated her from Gloria, but she could not help saying:

"Perhaps it would surprise you, Mrs. Malvern, to know that I saw your husband but twice

after he married you—one night soon after I came back from Egypt and that day at the Waldorf, and that meeting was accidental.”

The statement drew Gloria to her feet.

“Why—I do find it hard to believe,” she said nervously. “It is, indeed, a very, very great surprise to me.”

“It is the truth,” Renée asserted. “Mr. Kiraldy would have found it out, too, if he had let me talk instead of bullying me with his questions.”

“You mean that another woman had come into my husband’s life?” Gloria asked, a feeling of dizziness sweeping over her.

Renée glanced at her shrewdly. “Surely,” said she, “you are not putting that as a question. I thought you were being frank with me.”

“I hardly understand you,” declared Gloria. “There is no reason why I should be other than frank with you.”

“But certainly you know that your husband was carrying on a flirtation with a woman in

your own set—one of your very good friends, for that matter. Why, during the trial I believed that you and Mr. Ducharme were being painfully careful to keep her name out of it. I don't wish to pose or seem to claim any virtue that is not mine, but if I said nothing it was only because I was following what I thought was the example you had set. It seemed cruel to ruin another reputation."

Aghast, Gloria caught the back of a chair for support.

"You have been mistaken," she cried. "Nothing could be farther from the truth. Do you think I would have hesitated over a reputation, knowing that his life was at stake? My dear girl, you don't know what you have done. Who is the woman? I can't begin to tell you how important it is to me."

Renée could not believe her ears. It was incredible! "I can't believe that you don't know," she declared. "You have been blind, Mrs. Malvern." Gloria's white face alarmed

her. "I warn you that it is going to come as a shock. It's—it's Anne Cabot!"

*"Anne Cabot!"*

Faint, Gloria dropped into a chair. A noise, as of thunder, rolled in her ears. Eyes closed, her brain reeling, she fought the nausea creeping over her. Anne Cabot! Acts, which she had not questioned, translated themselves into matters of dreadful moment. Anne's running away—her conduct at Bois Blanc—and the buckle! It was the sort of thing Anne went in for! Had *she* killed Jim?

Gloria shuddered at the thought; it was too ghastly, too terrible. . . . Anne! She felt that she must leave at once or not be able to go. She wanted to be alone—outside—home; anywhere but in this stifling room. Weak, dazed, unable as yet to comprehend what all this meant to Pierre, she reached her car.

From her window Renée watched the car move away.

"Game to the last," she murmured eloquently.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### TO SAVE A LIFE

BROM came on Friday, anxious to know if anything had developed from Gloria's visit with Renée. Gloria had been in a quandary ever since coming home; feeling at times, that she could not say anything to Brom until she had confirmed what Renée had said. Common sense warned her, however, that each day was precious, and that to keep the matter from Brom would be to jeopardize Pierre's life.

Brom took the news coldly. In some way it did not come as a surprise to him. He wondered if an incident or two at Bois Blanc had prepared him for it.

"It's going to be a terrible blow to John," he said. "He doesn't deserve it."

"You do not doubt that it is true, then?" Gloria asked.

"I—I wish I had, Gloria. Still, we can't think of John. And Anne doesn't concern me. God! Think of it—running away and leaving Ducharme to die!"

He got up and took a turn around the room, muttering to himself.

"Well, I suppose she figured it was her life or his."

"I doubt it!" Brom exclaimed earnestly. "I can't believe it! Anne did not shoot Jim; she isn't up to it; she's dangerous only in a small way; her cynical, calculating type never achieve murder. To steal your husband—to make love to him beneath your roof—well, Anne could do that; but murder—no! Don't think that we've solved this mystery yet; this is but the beginning. Anne got over her head some way; she knows what happened—saw it with her own eyes, perhaps. She was thinking only of her reputation in keeping still. I had a long talk with Pierre yesterday; he sticks to his story to the dot. Absolutely positive that he saw a man

enter the house after the light appeared in the window. I suggested that it might have been Jim, but he swears the man was much too short for Jim. I don't know why it is, but even you and I seem to feel that we must prove Pierre's story before we can accept it. Bit by bit, we are doing it; but from now on I am going to base every conclusion I make on his statement."

"Do I seem to waver in my faith in Pierre?" asked Gloria, not sure whether she should feel hurt or not.

"Of course not!" Brom exclaimed. "I didn't mean to insinuate that. But don't let us waste any time in pursuing clues that do not seem to fit in with what he claims happened. And we must prove that Anne was at the farm that night. It's not going to be an easy task."

Brom smoked in silence for a minute.

"Gloria," he exclaimed suddenly, "are you willing to do whatever I suggest concerning Anne?"

The question startled Gloria.

"Why, yes," she said after a moment. "I have great respect for your judgment, Brom."

"You may find the task I'm going to set you more than you have bargained for," said he. "But there is not any other way out of it, Gloria; you've got to go to Cabot Manor."

"Yes?" she urged.

"John is having a desperate time getting nurses. He told me the other evening that he had telephoned as far north as Albany before he could find one to relieve the girl who had been up day and night with Laddie for days on end. Dr. Leavitt says there are hundreds of cases of influenza in Westchester. Laddie is out of danger now. Still, John would be glad to have your help; with a trained nurse to instruct you, you can do all that a practical nurse could accomplish."

"It's not a very enviable rôle, is it?" asked Gloria.

"No, it's not. And yet, I believe you would be doing John a kindness. If we can make

Anne talk, without resorting to the police, we can avoid some of the publicity that would be inevitable otherwise. I don't know what you will find there; certainly the end justifies any means. You've never met John, have you?"

Gloria signified that she had not.

"Well, that's very fortunate for us, because you are not going to Cabot Manor as Mrs. Malvern. When I speak to John I will tell him that my doctor recommended you to me. We'll have to provide a name for you. How about Saunders?—Miss Saunders; it sounds nursesey to me."

"But is all this deception necessary? I hate the part, Brom. Besides, I called on Mrs. Cabot once."

"She'll not recognize you; you'll arrive in a nurse's uniform. As for John, he would never consent to the arrangement if I were to mention your name. He would feel indebted to you if he accepted your offer; and that it was but the prelude to your asking him for a pardon

for Pierre. He is not a politician; but even so, he would not permit himself to be compromised. What do you say, Gloria? Shall I call him?"

Gloria nodded bravely. "Yes, I'll go," said she. "It may mean Pierre's life; what it costs me must not matter."

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### AT CABOT MANOR

GLORIA had cause almost immediately to congratulate herself for having followed Brom's advice. John and his mother had accepted her without question. In fact, Miss Reynolds, the nurse in charge, was the only one to ask questions which she found hard to answer—semi-professional ones regarding training schools and professional acquaintances. Gloria saved herself by saying that she had only lately come East. It followed as a matter of course that she and Miss Reynolds should be together, more or less, day and night. In the early days of Laddie's illness the great room adjoining his had been given his nurse with the thought of saving as many steps as possible. Gloria shared this room with Miss Reynolds. The windows had been hastily shorn of their hangings,

pictures removed from the walls and such personal touches as give a room distinction carried away to other parts of the house. And yet the big, airy chamber retained an air of grandeur. But for all that Gloria was totally unprepared for Irish Norah's startling statement that it was Anne's room.

A feverish desire to explore the great closets seized Gloria; but not until the third evening did an opportunity present itself. Laddie was so much better that Miss Reynolds had deemed it safe to leave him in Gloria's care for a few hours. The boy fell asleep soon after they left. John or Mrs. Cabot might come in at any moment; but Gloria decided to risk their surprising her, and with rapidly beating heart she threw open a closet door.

A jumble of hats and dresses met her eye. Bric-à-brac had been piled in one corner—a silver dressing set and such other articles as perhaps Norah had been instructed to remove from the room. A great array of pumps and

shoes littered the floor. One by one, Gloria examined them, but not a pair gave any evidence of having been pierced with a buckle pin of any kind.

Three or four hat boxes leaned crazily upon the shelf above her head. Getting up on a chair, Gloria ran her hands through them. A cold shiver ran down her spine as her fingers closed upon a badly scuffed pair of brown silk pumps. With nerves taut she got down from the chair and closed the closet door. The pumps burned her fingers as she carried them to the dresser to examine them in the light of the lamp which stood upon it.

A glance showed her the blackened holes worn shiny from the play of the buckles which had once adorned the slippers. Turning one so that the sheen of the silk caught the light-rays, she made out the outline of a buckle—an unfaded spot dark against the rest of the pump.

The buckle which Gregory had found had

been imprinted in Gloria's mind so vividly that she mentally fitted it to the slipper in her hand and found that in each twist and curve it exactly matched the unfaded spot. To be certain she got the buckle from her purse and attached it to the pump; it ended any doubt she had left; the buckle was Anne's!

Gloria wanted to get in touch with Brom at once, but she dared not telephone from the Manor. Laddie stirred uneasily and she went in and covered him. She was grateful for the coolness of the room. The low windows overlooked a lily pond—weed-clogged now, but still reminiscent of departed glories beneath the young December moon. Gloria sat staring at it, lost in thought, wondering where in all the big house Anne had hidden the missing buckle. The old pond fascinated Gloria.

John came in as she sat there. As she talked with him an explanation of the attraction the pond held for her flashed in her mind. No sooner was he gone than she ran to the win-

dow. Seizing an empty bottle, she tossed it into the air. A moment later it sank beneath the oily surface of the pond with a gurgling sound. Had Anne Cabot stood in her window and tossed the incriminating buckle into the pond as she had just now tossed the empty bottle? Where in Cabot Manor could she have found a better hiding place?

Miss Reynolds returned before eleven. Gloria tried to sleep, but through her dreams there floated a picture of the green, moss-green bottom of the old pond. She was still in bed when Norah came in the following morning.

“I didn’t mane to be afther dishturbing you, miss,” said she. “Go on and have your beauty sleep; although you have small need of one, what with all the looks the good God gave ye. I swear as ye lie there ye look for all the world like the picthure paper likenesses of Mrs. Jim Malvern; that ye do! A great lady she is, too, says I who have hooked and buttoned a few as thought they wuz ladies.”

Gloria forced a smile to her lips as Norah stood shaking her head as if inviting her to deny that Mrs. Malvern was "a great lady."

"You but echo my own opinion of her," Gloria answered dryly. "You'll come back in half an hour, Norah?"

"Shure I'll come back," Norah answered as she gathered up her brooms. No one had followed the Malvern case with greater assiduity than Norah. In a large way, she took her romance from the illustrated papers. "It must be wonderful to be loved by wan of thim French guides," she said wistfully. "I've been made love to by all kinds, but never the French. Shure, ye don't think the Frenchman killed Jim Malvern, do ye, miss?"

Gloria winced. How many other maids and cooks were discussing her?

"Please, Norah!" she said sharply. "Do run along."

"Now I've annoyed ye, haven't I?" Norah exclaimed. "Bad luck to me for it. But ye

know this James Malvern wa'n't no stranger to me. Many the time he's been here to see Mister John in the ould days. Well, I had the night of his murther marked in me moind; faith and I little thought I'd be here the following day taking orders from her royal 'ighness. There! Ye see me tongue running away again. I'll have yer breakfast sint up."

But Gloria no longer wished her to leave.

"And who might her royal highness be?"

Gloria asked, to detain her.

Norah made a wry face.

"Miss Anne I mane. Oh, a great lady she is—or so she thinks, with her talk of Paree this and Paree that. To hear her ye'd think Noo Yorruk was jist wan of these sooburban additions. She's not like the ould mother of Mister John; he's a foine man, is Mister John, never a cross worrud."

"Perhaps you do not try to understand her," Gloria suggested, wondering how she could swing the conversation to the happenings of

the night which Norah had said she remembered so well.

“Understand her? That’s all I tried to do until the night poor Mister Malvern was killed. Mister John’s orders is for us to be in by midnight. Me gintleman friend, Mister Jerry O’Donnell, had taken me to the movies; it was only a quarter of the hour as we came up the path. No more had we turned in thin a taxi comes chugging up the drive, and Miss Anne steps out. She gives me an awful look, miss, and whin I start upstairs, she calls me in. I thought I was in for it; she only says, ‘Take these downstairs and burn them.’ And she hands me a pair of stockings. Brown silk they wuz, fine as a spider’s web; but ripped and torn to make me heart bleed. Been playing golf she’d been. Foine clothes for golf, thinks I to meself; wading through briars and stickers and with such stuff and Mister John so careful of the pennies.

“But I took them down to the kitchen fire.

It was a shame to burn thim, I thought, whin I could fix thim fer meself. I didn't expect she'd be waiting for me, but she wuz, and she saw me try to hide thim. I thought she'd go mad. Never have I been so talked to like that before. But for Mister John I'd never have marched down thim stairs again that night."

Norah caught a glimpse of Gloria's face; and she dropped her broom precipitately.

"Here I stand jabbering," she accused herself, "and you famished for a bite to eat. I'll bring it to ye meself."

Gloria drew a deep breath into her lungs as the door closed. Was any further evidence necessary? In her mind's eye she could see Anne fighting her way through the underbrush, the mad haste to get home, her dismay at finding Norah there to see her alight from some rattle-trap taxi, then her terror at finding the buckle gone, the urge to get rid of its mate, to destroy the torn stockings! What alibi could she offer against this chain of facts?

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE TRUTH AT LAST

GLORIA dressed hurriedly, her train of thought broken, chaotic. Before she had finished, Norah returned, the breakfast tray held at a perilous angle, her whole demeanor announcing her excitement.

"She's downstairs!" she whispered with the air of one imparting a great surprise. "Miss Anne—and come without a word of warning, too. And mad she is to know that Mister John took the liberty of giving her room to you and Miss Reynolds."

Gloria felt her knees go weak. Her eyes sought the windows; but they were too high; escape did not lie in that direction. She pushed Norah aside as she caught up her coat and ran to the door, her one thought to flee, to get away from Cabot Manor before Anne should con-

front her. There was something tigerish about her movements. Norah stared at her open-mouthed. But even as Gloria put her hand on the knob her ears caught the sound of voices on the stairs—voices which she recognized as John's and Anne's.

She groaned as she realized that she was trapped. Perhaps they would go in to see Laddie. Gloria told herself she would open the door and dash down the stairs if they should.

Norah had found her tongue. "What is it, Miss?" she questioned kindly.

"Nothing—nothing, Norah," Gloria answered as she leaned panting against the door. She heard John's knock; Miss Reynolds answered it; Laddie was sleeping. The nurse was presented to Anne. They spoke in half whispers. Gloria stiffened as she heard John apologize for having to ask Miss Reynolds to use another room; he would speak to Miss Saunders too. She was having breakfast; they'd just look in for a moment.

A few seconds would bring them to her door. The warning was brief, and yet it was long enough to permit Gloria to get control of herself. Leaving the door, she walked back to the table on which Norah had spread her breakfast. The steadiness of her step surprised her; she was even conscious of feeling annoyed with herself for her confusion of a moment ago. Very courageously she waited for Anne and John to enter; she had accomplished her purpose in coming to Cabot Manor—had made a new trial certain for Pierre. Whatever happened in the next few minutes could not dim the importance of that!

Norah glanced at her as John knocked. "Admit them," she said calmly.

"May we come in?" John said.

"Certainly," Gloria murmured, getting to her feet.

He turned to his sister at that. "Anne," said he, "this is Miss Saunders. She has been very——"

He did not finish, for Anne's startled exclamation came without warning.

"Gloria Malvern!" There was no mistaking the note of alarm in Anne's voice.

Bewildered, John glanced from her to Gloria. His voice failed him for a moment.

"Gloria Malvern?" he queried. "Why, I don't think I understand. This is Miss Saunders, Anne."

"Saunders? Are you blind, John?" she demanded. "You've been fooled!" She threw off John's hand and stepped toward Gloria. "You came here to spy on me, didn't you?" she cried. "It was clever of you to gain admission here as a nurse. Surely, you are not brazen enough to deny your identity to me!"

"Anne!" John cried sternly, before Gloria could answer. His warning was not without effect on Anne, for her eyes dropped as her brother searched them for some answer to her strange conduct. Turning to Gloria he asked: "Are you Mrs. Malvern?"

Gloria nodded. "I—I am Mrs. Malvern."

"O, holy mither of God," Norah gasped as John and Gloria gazed at each other without flinching. It was John who turned away.

"Anne," said he, "why should Mrs. Malvern come here to spy on you? What is back of this?" His deep voice quavered with suppressed emotion.

"Perhaps—perhaps I overstated myself," Anne replied nervously, realizing how incautious she had been. "Perhaps she thought to enlist your support for a pardon for Ducharme."

"I did not come here for a pardon," Gloria declared coldly in answer to John's inquiring glance. "I do not think that Anne used the wrong word; I did come here to spy on her, as she put it. I realize that an explanation is due you. It might better come from Anne, but if she will not speak, I shall."

"You choose to be melodramatic," Anne laughed sarcastically. "I am not afraid of any-

thing you may have discovered about me. If you insist in further discrediting yourself by attacking me, I'll make no effort to stop you; anything you say will be taken for what it is worth. I suppose we might continue this scene without Norah."

John agreed, but Gloria said very pointedly.

"I think it will be better if Norah remains; you may find her very necessary, Anne. Her sense of discretion is going to become very important to you . . . I believe you understand me."

Anne threw up her head angrily. "A maid's gossip!" she cried scornfully, not failing to grasp the intimation in Gloria's words. "Go on with your absurd theatricalisms," she snapped. "You cannot leave too soon."

Gloria gave no sign that she had heard. Turning to John she said:

"It is not easy for me to tell what I feel you deserve to know; and yet it may prove itself a kindness. I had a very definite purpose in

coming here; and I have accomplished it. I have proved beyond question that Anne knows who killed Jim."

"*What!*" The exclamation snapped from John's lips like the crack of a whip. Gloria saw the perspiration break on his forehead. She could hear Norah crying. Turning her head again, she leveled her eyes at Anne. Seconds slipped by as they stared at each other in wooden silence.

John followed this silent play of eyes. As he watched, he saw his sister tremble as she strove to throw off the terror that was clutching at her. Gloria appeared to grow calmer, her self-possession growing with each passing second. Icy fingers gripped John's heart. Shrewd lawyer that he was, he could not help but see in which direction the scales were leaning.

And, indeed, Gloria had gained complete mastery of herself. Abe Ascher would have pronounced her supreme as she faced Anne.

As they fenced with their eyes, fact and fancy welded themselves into the chain of evidence with which she hoped to bring Anne to her knees.

“What is your answer, Anne?” John urged bravely.

“Answer?” Anne echoed. “Is an answer necessary to such a preposterous lie?”

“Perhaps you can explain how this buckle came to be found beneath the open window at Malvern Farm,” said Gloria. “Mr. Gregory picked it up.”

Anne winced as Gloria offered the buckle for her inspection.

“It’s not mine!” she cried. “I never saw it before.”

“And yet it fits the unfaded spot on this pump which I found in your closet,” Gloria went on, taking the brown silk slipper from a dresser-drawer. “This pump was made in Paris—Boutillier et Cie, 71 Rue de la Paix.” Gloria paused, and turning to Norah she said: “Does

the color of this pump match the torn stockings which Miss Cabot had you burn for her on the night Mr. Malvern was killed?"

Sobbing, Norah shuffled forward and gazed at the slipper.

"Y-y-y-yis, ma'am," she mumbled, "it's the same."

John groaned as Norah stood there helplessly.

"Norah remembers the night," Gloria insisted, "because Mr.—er—Jerry O'Donnell had taken her to the movies that evening. She reached the Manor just as Anne alighted from a White Plains taxi. There is an express from Pawling at ten forty-two which arrives in White Plains about an hour later. The night agent there would remember the lady who purchased a ticket from him on the particular night—it was the only one he sold."

Gloria was offering as facts matters which had yet to be established, but the effect on Anne was immediate.

"Lies! Lies!" she cried. "John! John! Stop her!"

Anne's face was white, ghastly; she tore at her dress.

"The police will have to——"

"The police!" It was a scream, wild, terror-laden. Anne's eyes closed, she put out her hands as if to steady herself. John caught her as she tottered. Tenderly he lifted her and carried her to the bed, an expression of ineffable sadness in his eyes.

"What a horrible mistake," he groaned. "Anne, Anne!" Raising his eyes to Norah he said: "Go to my study and wait until I come."

When she had gone he turned to Gloria. "Have you communicated with the police?" he asked miserably. Gloria shook her head. "Please don't," he went on. "Let me save her if I can. Will you promise me?"

Gloria nodded again, too full for words.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### ANNE CONFESSES

JOHN CABOT's head sagged as he stood beside the bed waiting for Anne to regain consciousness, but even at such a moment his thought was not of himself.

"Mrs. Malvern," he whispered, "we must keep any word of this from my mother. I don't believe she could weather such a blow. Please don't think there is any thought of myself in what I'm asking. My career means a great deal to me, but less—far less—than the good name of my family and the happiness of my mother."

"I do not doubt you," Gloria said softly. "I did not come here for revenge—Anne need not fear that. But she can help me. . . . She knows who shot Jim. Pierre Ducharme would

not have spent a day in jail if Anne had told the truth . . . You say you are not thinking of yourself. Well—I, too, can be unselfish. I have suffered, you will admit . . . but I am willing—very willing—to forget that. I insist on knowing the truth. Anne can save Pierre, and that's the price I ask for my silence."

"It is little enough to ask," John replied carefully. "I—assure you Anne will do all she can to help. By the way, Mrs. Malvern, you never asked me to pardon Ducharme. Under the circumstances—my debt to Jim—it would have been hard for me to have refused. I—want to thank you for your consideration. But I have been asked to pardon him—letters, telegrams, telephone calls. . . ."

"From some one I know?"

"From Anne. I should have suspected the truth. I could not understand her mad insistence."

"That makes it easier for me to forgive her," Gloria murmured kindly.

Anne's hands fluttered to her face. The next moment she opened her eyes and gazed up at them.

"Are you all right, Anne?" John asked. A movement of the eyes reassured him. "Mrs. Malvern has promised not to inform the police." Anne was past any further denial. "Why didn't you confide in me?" he murmured.

"I wanted to, John, but I was afraid. You must have thought me mad when I began calling you long distance; I couldn't help it—I couldn't stay away . . . I know what a rotter you think I am."

Her voice trailed off into a whisper.

"I—I tried to fight this thing, John," she went on brokenly. "I wasn't in love with Jim. The money—I guess it was the money that blinded me."

Bit by bit John drew from her the story of the affair with Malvern, of his death, and her mad flight back to the Manor.

"I didn't realize that I'd lost the buckle until

I got up here. I threw the other one into the pond. I was afraid to throw the pumps—afraid they wouldn't sink."

Gloria was crying softly to herself. Anne looked at her beseechingly. "Gloria, don't—you are killing me . . . Poor Ducharme—I couldn't stay away—I had to come back. I could see his eyes peering at me wherever I turned—accusing . . . Oh, God, I have suffered, Gloria."

She grew a bit hysterical as she went on.

"I'll go to that terrible prison and take his place," she exclaimed. "I deserve it—I deserve it, John!"

Gloria was touched. "Please, Anne," she begged, "don't go on this way. There is still time to do the right thing."

"Time?" Anne laughed bitterly. "Can anything I do ever make me right with myself again?"

"You're beside yourself, now," John argued. "We must do everything we can to help Du-

charme. . . . You know who killed Jim, don't you, Anne?"

"It happened right before my eyes!"

"And the man's name?"

"I don't know; he was a stranger."

"But you would recognize the man?" John interrupted.

"John, I'll never forget his face as he stood there in the doorway. He'd been following me for a week."

"Blackmail," he muttered. "Where did you first notice him?"

"At the station—and at the garage. Always at the garage."

And so the long hunt for Wheeler Johnson began. But justice was to be cheated, for, when the authorities closed in on him, they found they were too late; Wheeler had paid the price for taking a dark-eyed chola's smile too seriously.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

“I HAVE DUCHARME!”

ONCE again the newspapers buzzed with the Malvern case. By the narrowest of margins the Cabot name escaped the searchlights of publicity. From the district attorney's office came the startling news that Ducharme was innocent, that the police hoped to arrest the murderer in a day or two—

Renée Grant was caught in the undertow once more—what did she know about Wheeler Johnson?—and Renée foresaw the end.

In the meantime, Pierre walked forth a free man. Brom was there to meet him. He saw the big man's face fall at finding him alone.

“I advised her not to come, Pierre,” said he. “I have a letter for you. You are not to open it until you are on your way north again. Her doctors have advised her to go abroad—Swit-

zerland. She's tired, worn out. It's going to take a long rest to bring back the color to her cheeks. But life doesn't end here; in fact, it hasn't begun for the two of you . . . You wouldn't want it to begin here."

"You are right, my friend—and friend you are," Pierre exclaimed, and he gripped Brom's hand until Brom cried stop.

Not until his train pulled out of Saranac for the north did Ducharme open Gloria's letter. It said:

PIERRE, DEAR:

I could not come to-day. I could not bear to say good-bye against such a background. Go north, Pierre; forget this terrible experience even as I shall try to forget it.

I am going abroad. Just where, or for how long, I cannot say. I have no plans, want none, for the matter of that—just rest and forgetfulness.

But always, wherever I am, I shall tell myself that I have Ducharme; that somewhere he is waiting for me; that some day I must go to him.

G.——

Then, as ever afterward, Ducharme drew courage from that letter. In the long months that followed he came to lean on it for support and faith when it seemed that Gloria had gone from his life forever.

His arrival at Chicoutimi was not unheralded. Felix and Amiel were there to meet him, as were a hundred others. His exoneration had been complete, and his people turned to him as they never had in the old days. Perhaps it was that they saw in his vindication a vindication of their race. Throughout the long winter Pierre's name clung to men's lips and when the elections came his electoral district returned him to Parliament—a warrior to wage the factional fight between French- and English-speaking Canadians which goes on with the years.

It opened a new life to Ducharme; his dreams, the old idealism, came back to him, for now there was some promise of fulfilment. Spring gave way to summer. Ottawa lost its

air of importance. But Pierre stayed on for two weeks after the last session, hopeful that some word might come from her. Perhaps she had written him at Chicoutimi. With this hope to busy him, he hurried home, but there was no word for him, only a letter from Anne—a new Anne—but he found himself unable to answer it. He did not lose faith. Some day, Gloria had said!

Ambition had come with his wider vision, and as the summer wore on he roamed the woods contracting for pulp wood against the day when the paper makers should move further north.

He arose one morning to hear the piping of quail. Fall was not far off. Another week and the woods and fields were slashed with gold and scarlet. He was far east of Lac St. John. Another month and he would be getting ready to leave Chicoutimi for Ottawa. Weeks had passed since he had taken the trail. With a glad cry he started back to the river. He

sang as he covered the long miles. Perhaps this time—

And now he had his reward. The long-awaited letter was there to greet him . . . She was coming! A day—two days—what did it matter? He had schooled himself to be patient. The North had put on its royal dress for her. They would go to the falls of the Au Sable where he had sung his humble *chansons* for her. The falls of the Au Sable in autumn! The packs must be made ready, matters arranged with the magistrate, Father Bouchet informed.

No, a day or two did not matter. He, Ducharme, had been waiting—always waiting for her!

THE END.

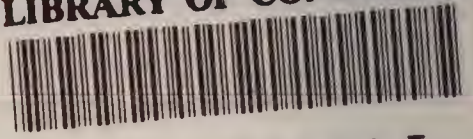






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